Introduction

Islands at War

THE CONDITION OF affairs suggested by the term 'the Irish Troubles' was already some three centuries old when Columbus discovered America. A degree of strife between the inhabitants of the islands of what now constitute Ireland and the United Kingdom existed long before the discovery. For example, St Patrick, whom legend has established as the Irish National Apostle, was a Briton brought to Ireland, supposedly in 432, by Irish pirates after one of their frequent forays against the neighbouring isle. But in our day the 'Irish Troubles' are generally understood to refer to a murderous dispute which, for the past quarter of a century only, has come to involve the English and the Irish in a sectarian quarrel in the north-eastern part of Ireland commonly, but erroneously, referred to as 'Ulster'. Like many stereotypical depictions of the Anglo-Irish relationship, depending for their coloration on considerations such as whether they are Irish or English, Nationalist or Loyalist, the varying calculations as to when and how the Troubles began contain both truth and distortion.

The tragedy of the last twenty-five years did come upon the two islands both gradually and suddenly – like bankruptcy. In fact, as we shall see, in a very real sense there was a bankruptcy, of policy, which led to the Troubles bursting upon an unsuspecting population with appalling suddenness. But the Irish agony had been building up slowly also, rooted in complex factors, one of which, geography, pre-dates the dawn of history: others involve the outworkings of two forms of colonialism, those of Mother Church and Mother England.

Geography has decreed that Ireland's head almost nestles on Scotland's shoulder, being separated by only some twelve miles of water between the Antrim coast and the Mull of Kintyre. And while her buttocks, the south-eastern coasts of Wexford and Waterford, are

further removed, they are still no more than eighty miles from the coast of Wales. It was in this area that the first serious Norman penetrations occurred during the late 1160s. To the physical force school of Irish nationalism the Norman coming is generally regarded as the starting point for 'eight hundred years of British oppression'. The Norman invasion, and what preceded and followed it, requires a more complex interpretation than that, but it does provide a most important signpost to the present 'Troubles'.

By the time the Normans arrived, geography had dictated that the two islands had both shared and escaped great events together. The Romans conquered England but, having looked across the turbulent Irish Sea and weighed up the difficulties of subduing the equally tempestuous inhabitants of the then thickly forested isle to the west, decided not to attempt to extend their imperium to Ireland. Insularity therefore ensured that, unlike its neighbour, Ireland did not become influenced by Roman laws and culture or, for some centuries, by significant changes in living patterns such as the development of cities. These only began to sprout after the arrival of the Vikings in the ninth century, long after the Roman legions had vanished. Gaelic society continued to be centred on cattle rearing, rather than on tillage.

But indicators such as the near-Pharaonic knowledge of mathematics and building skills needed to construct huge tombs, like that at Newgrange in Co. Meath, or the survival of skilfully worked golden artefacts suggest that Ireland had achieved high levels of learning and wealth long before the coming of Christianity. It was the subsequent concentration of wealth – generated by the learning – in the monasteries which first attracted the Vikings to the country. The power of the Vikings was broken in 1014 at the battle of Clontarf, in which armies of the provinces of Connacht and Munster, under Brian Boru, defeated those of Leinster, under King Maelmordha, for the high-kingship of Ireland. Viking contingents fought on both sides, but the destruction of Maelmordha's forces also entailed breaking the grip of the Norse King Sitric on Dublin, which because of its fleets and anchorage facilities had effectively grown into the commercial and political capital of the country. Thereafter pockets of Norse influence remained throughout the country, notably at Wexford and Waterford, but the dominant influence became Gaelic once more.

Although Irish cultural achievement was considerable, the achievement lay, and continued to lie, against a different religious backdrop to that occurring in England. As far back as the Synod of Whitby, in the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon monks, inspired by the teachings of Rome, had successfully led the charge against Irish practices which had established themselves not only in Ireland but throughout Northumbria. Unlike the Roman custom of leaving the skull bare, surrounded by a fringe of hair, the Irish monks tonsured themselves at

the front. They also calculated Easter as occurring on a different date to that favoured by their Roman-influenced counterparts.

By the time of the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169 the effect of such controversies had been heightened and added to by reports that Irish Christianity had wandered into barbarity, far from the path aspired to by the Gregorian reformers favoured by Rome. Geography, with its consequential virtually unbroken Celtic tradition in matters social and cultural, had resulted in the growth of marked incompatibilities between the Celtic and Latin churches. These, as the distinguished historian Dr F. X. Martin has noted, 'found expression in attitudes towards marriage, celibacy of the clergy, baptism and the sacramental system, control of church lands'.[1] Where the question of control was concerned it should be noted that Celtic usage had resulted in great abbeys frequently passing into the hands of powerful families whose appointees exercised far greater 'clout' than did the bishops appointed by Rome.

It did not matter that the Irish also possessed a distinctive and highly developed religious tradition renowned for both its scholarship and its missionary zeal, to a degree that caused Thomas Cahill to claim that the Irish 'saved civilisation'. As Cahill points out:

> Without the zeal of the Irish Monks, who single-handedly refounded civilisation throughout the continent in the bays and valleys of their exile, the world that came after them would have been an entirely different one – a world without books. And our own world would never have come to be.[2]

Cahill is supported in his evaluation of the Irish contribution by another independent authority who judged that:

> The travels and settlement of Irish monks and scholars on the Continent of Europe, that complex movement of expansion . . . is one of the most important cultural phenomena of the early Middle Ages. There is nothing in pre-Carolingian Europe that could match it in either extent or lasting effect. In Northern France and Burgundy, in the territories of modern Switzerland, Northern Italy, in the Rhine Valley, in Franconia, in Bavaria and in the Salzburg area, the Scotti, as the Irish were called until the eleventh century, have left their traces. They were as famous for their learning as they were for their religious zeal and for the rigour of their monastic rules, no less known was their wrangling spirit, which involved them in many a controversy. Even in the Carolingian Empire they played an important role, which was not always to the liking of their continental colleagues.[3]

It was certainly not to the liking of their neighbouring colleagues. When the time became opportune, Anglo-Norman statecraft and Vatican geopolitics would act in concert to further Anglo-Norman

imperialism at the expense of the Irish. As a result of direct anti-Irish lobbying with Pope Adrian IV, an Englishman, by his compatriot, the celebrated philosopher and clerical diplomat John of Salisbury, Salisbury was later able to write with accuracy: 'In response to my petition the Pope granted and donated Ireland to the illustrious king of England, Henry . . .'[4]

Thus was papal policy towards Ireland set. Adrian's plans for the Irish were carried forward by his successor, Pope Alexander III. Despite the fact that Henry II was out of favour with the papacy, because of the murder of Thomas à Becket, the Pope issued the King with letters ordering the Irish to be subject to him. But this confabulation between Christ and Caesar required one more ingredient for success. It was to be forthcoming from Ireland. One of the ironies of history is that Salisbury's initiative on behalf of Anglo-Norman imperialism was given its final successful impetus by an Irishman, Diarmuid MacMurchada, King of Leinster, who invited the help of Henry II in putting down his local enemies. After much parleying and delay a party of Norman knights and their followers arrived on the Wexford coast in 1169, capturing the major cites in the area, Waterford and Wexford, and eventually gaining control of Dublin. In return for his support of MacMurchada, the Norman knight Richard FitzGilbert – or Strongbow, as he is better remembered in Ireland – was given MacMurchada's daughter, Aoife, in marriage and succeeded him as King of Leinster.

MacMurchada to this day is execrated by some in Ireland for thus initiating both the 'eight hundred years of British oppression' and its corollary, 'The Full National Demand' of later generations of Irish nationalists. The Demand, which the IRA are still making as this is being written, is that the British presence be removed and Ireland be ruled by the Irish. MacMurchada was in fact probably not a great deal bloodier, nor more treacherous, than other leaders of the period, merely more innovative and far-seeing. For example, he secured the position of abbess of a great convent in Co. Kildare for a female relative by having his soldiers abduct and rape the existing abbess. As the post could only be held by a virgin, the rape debarred her from continuing. In one sense there was ample precedent for MacMurchada's Norman initiative: previous Irish kings had made copious use of Viking mercenaries in their incessant wars.

The difference was that the Normans would not so much assist Irish kings as supplant them. Henceforth the King of England considered himself the King of Ireland. Norman methods of warfare, involving chain mail, the use of cavalry and the building of castles, devastated the lightly armed Irish foot soldiers. There was not only a clash of culture, but of agriculture. Norman expertise furthered tillage to the disadvantage of the semi-nomadic, cattle-herding natives. And, more

lastingly, the Normans' arrival henceforth meant that what happened in, or to, England affected Ireland, and vice versa. However, though Ireland lay too close to England for independence, unlike the other Celtic regions of Wales and Scotland, she lay just too far away for complete conquest. Though successive British kings and generals arrived in Ireland imbued with the same attitude towards the natives as that displayed by the whites towards the aborigines of both Australia and North America, insurgency – be it of native origin, or in concert with some enemy of hers, Spain or France – continued throughout the centuries to be a problem for England. Off her western approaches there now lay a green Cuba.

The underlying military policy used to address that problem is concealed in a famous, deceptively innocent, couplet commemorating an incident which occurred at a creek near Waterford the year after the first Norman party landed at Wexford:

> At the creek of Baginbun
> Ireland was lost and won.

Here some hundred Anglo-Normans defeated roughly ten times that number of Norse and Irish, taking seventy of them prisoner. By way of terrorising those who would oppose the invaders and their ally, MacMurchada, these had their limbs broken and were then beheaded and their bodies thrown over the cliffs. And so it continued through the ages and the monarchies: the Tudors, Stuarts, Cromwell, William of Orange. The English throne continued with varying degrees of success to exert its influence in Ireland, through making invasions and settlements, the difficulties posed by geography and terrain being partially compensated for by the Irish tendency to either feud amongst themselves, or follow Diarmuid MacMurchada's example of entering into alliance with the outsiders. While all this meant that it was generally the native Irish who went over the cliffs, there were a number of other consequences.

To begin with, as the Irish normally came off second best in set-piece military encounters, and did far better when they used the tactic of employing the bogs and forests to harry and hide, a tradition of guerrilla warfare entered Irish folklore to emerge finally with a degree of success in the early part of the twentieth century. Secondly, the Reformation gave a new religious coloration to the pursuit of imperial aims, the Irish, including the 'old Irish', as the descendants of the original settlers became known, continuing faithful to Rome, whereas the Crown forces were Protestant. This distinction became particularly significant for our day during the rule of James I. He added to the pro-Protestant policies of the Tudors, and their resultant slaughter, by 'planting' six of the north-eastern counties of Ulster, in the process

creating the new county of Londonderry around the hinterland of the ancient settlement of Derry. The plantation involved settling both English colonists and Scottish Presbyterians and Episcopalians on confiscated Irish lands. The planters with the biggest holdings, known as Undertakers, were forbidden to have Irish tenants. Smaller estate holders, known as Servitors, were permitted to take Irish tenants but, if they did so, their rents were increased. The planters' descendants still live in the area, some of them as keenly aware of the dangers, real or imagined, posed by their Catholic neighbours as were their ancestors during the periods of ferocious warfare involving Protestants and Catholics which ensued throughout the seventeenth century.

The massacres by Catholics of Protestants, which occurred in the religious wars of the 1640s, were magnified for propagandist purposes to justify Cromwell's subsequent genocide. In a very Irish fashion the Williamite wars – and one battle in particular, that of the Boyne, in 1690 – which followed the butcheries of Cromwell and his generals have been thoroughly misrepresented subsequently for contemporary political purposes. The leitmotif of today's Orangeman, emblazoned on banner and gable end, is the image of his icon, William of Orange, armoured, mounted on a white charger, sword aloft, as he leads the Protestant forces to victory. In the words of a famous Orange song, he 'fought for the freedom of religion . . . on the green grassy slopes of the Boyne'.

In fact William was fighting for the English crown against his rival James II as part of a far wider European campaign in which the Pope was opposed to Louis XIV and his allies and supported a coalition which included William of Orange. The papacy was thus on the side of the Protestant William, not the Catholic James. On learning of William's victory the Pope was so delighted that he arranged for the celebration of a Pontifical High Mass in Rome and ordered a Te Deum and the ringing of church bells.

Despite the Pope's exultation, William's victory meant that Irish Catholics had cause to mourn, not celebrate. A factor which frequently bedevilled Irish affairs, and which, as we shall see, re-entered the scene yet again in the post-1968 period in manner both decisive and malign, now re-emerged: the attitude of the dominant Protestants. An enlightened ruler, William had successfully concluded his campaign at Limerick by negotiating a reasonable treaty – by the standards of the time – and sailed off to his wider European theatre leaving the treaty's administration in the hands of the victorious Protestant settlers who had fought alongside him. To them the term 'Catholic' equalled 'treacherous', and they interpreted the treaty not in terms of equity, but as a means of ensuring Protestant ascendancy.

The effects of the penal laws further depressed Catholics, making it nearly impossible for them to own property, receive an education, or

enter the professions without renouncing their religion. The penal laws bore severely on English Catholics also, but the difference between the Irish and the English Catholics was that in Ireland the laws were used as a means of subjugating a race as much as a religion. Edmund Burke described the penal code as a

> machine of wise and elaborate contrivance and as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.

The effect of these laws on the swelling Irish underclass was brought home to me by two chance conversations conducted many years apart and on different sides of the globe, in Seoul and in London. The London encounter was between myself and an Irish professor of history who was describing a recent tour of old English farmhouses. 'You know,' he said, 'I have always thought of myself as an Anglophile, but it came home to me, looking at ordinary artefacts, I'm not talking about grand stuff that you'd see in castles, but dishes, knives, forks, jugs, plates, things like that that have survived from as far back as the sixteenth century, how little of that sort of thing exists in Ireland – and the reason. Just when people would be getting a little prosperity, every fifty years or so there'd be some new devastation and they'd be pounded back into the slime.'

The other observation came from a Korean presidential adviser who had been Korean ambassador to Washington. I commented on his impressive knowledge of the poet Yeats and he told me that his initial interest in Irish culture had come about because the Japanese used English colonial practice in Ireland as a headline for their own policy in Korea: extirpation of native culture, systems of land-holding, and inculcation of feelings of inferiority where things like language and traditional dress were concerned. It was an unexpected and telling illustration of the reasons why a nineteenth-century Irish school text instructed the learner to be thankful because he or she was a 'happy English child'.

London regarded the Protestant settlers in Ireland not merely as members of the favoured Church but as bulwarks of the Crown. For example, during the 1770s forces raised amongst northern Protestants were used to put down Catholic peasant agitation in the south. Against this backdrop, in 1762 the English Government intervened to abort a scheme, promoted by a Colonel Alexander McNutt, to populate Nova Scotia with Ulster Protestants. Hardy, self-reliant, and, unlike their dispossessed Catholic counterparts, generally possessed of a trade, money, and a woman kinswoman, be it sister or spouse, the Ulster planters were ideally suitable for dealing with the challenges of Canada's lonely opportunities. Accordingly the scheme was at first

given official backing, but on further investigation a government committee vetoed it in fright at the prospect that it might lead to 'depopulation of Protestant communities in Ireland'.[5] It is idle, but nevertheless beguiling, to speculate that, had it not done so, there might be no 'Ulster Troubles' today.

However, arguably, as the century closed, it was the Protestants who had given London most pause for thought. As the flag of revolution was unfurled in America and France, the Protestant ruling class set up their volunteer force, in 1782, ostensibly to defend Ireland from any foe. The strength of the Irish Volunteers forced the British to agree to the setting-up of a parliament in Dublin the following year. It was of course subservient to the House of Commons and, like the Volunteers, dominated by the landowning Protestant Ascendancy, chiefly Anglicans or Church of Ireland. The Anglicans looked with disfavour on one section of Protestantism, almost with as much disfavour as they did Catholics. These were the Presbyterian Dissenters in the north of Ireland, who also suffered a certain amount of disability under the law, thereby encouraging some of them to make common cause with the Catholics. However, the concerns the Dublin parliament addressed, with varying degrees of success, were the concerns of Ireland: the destruction of the Irish woollen trade in favour of Britain's; edicts forcing Irish merchants to sell their produce to England, not its colonies; the evils of absentee landlordism; and, significantly, defence. Moreover, the mere existence of a parliament in Dublin served to concentrate the wealthy, decision-taking echelon of the country in the capital so that the arts, commerce, and social life flourished. A Catholic middle class emerged.

In a sense the British rulers were back where Henry II had found himself when his knights invaded Ireland in the first place, back in 1169. The knights had speedily grown so powerful that the King had to come to Ireland at the head of an army to take personal control of the developing situation. Now, five hundred years on, the government in London felt an equal compulsion to take control of events in Ireland, but by different methods. For at the same time the Catholics, their eyes also fixed on what was happening abroad, came to be organised into a secret, oath-bound society, the United Irishmen, founded by middle-class Protestants. The aim of the United Irishmen was to unite Catholics, Protestants and Dissenters in setting up an Irish republic which would separate from England.

In the same year, 1795, following a sanguinary skirmish between Catholics and Protestants at Loughgall in Co. Armagh, another important society was founded in the ranks of the Catholics' opponents. The Orange Society, which swiftly became the Orange Order, held its first Twelfth of July demonstration the following year, 1796. To this day the Order is a powerful political and economic

force in Northern Ireland. Also in that year, one of the United Irishmen's principal leaders, Theobald Wolfe Tone, a Protestant, generally regarded as the father of Irish republicanism, made contact with the Directory in Paris with a view to acquiring arms and soldiers with which to put teeth into the United Irishmen's doctrines.

The country was in such a state of turmoil that one peer, Lord Moira, told the House of Lords that Ireland existed in 'the most disgusting tyranny that any nation ever groaned under . . . creating universal discontent and hatred of the English name'. A principal source of the opprobrium attaching to things English was the behaviour of the British Army, whose members were frequently forcibly billeted on unwilling Catholics. Its commander-in-chief, General Abercrombie, issued a famous general order which described the army as being 'in a state of licentiousness which must render it formidable to everyone but the enemy'. Not surprisingly, Abercrombie subsequently resigned. He was replaced by General Gerard Lake, whose prescription for dealing with the state of rebellion which broke out, or was provoked, in that blood-drenched year of 1798 was: 'take no prisoners'.

Suffice it to say that between the enforcement of Lake's order, by both regular troops and Protestant militia, and the sometimes savage reaction to it by Catholic insurgents, the 1798 rebellion fully lived up to the traditions of frightfulness established with such frequency over the previous centuries. It is the aftermath of the rebellion which concerns us. The rebellion itself, and in particular the capture of Wolfe Tone and a part of the French fleet which he was bringing to Ireland, gave the British a pretext for proroguing the Irish parliament. By the Act of Union of 1800, it was amalgamated with the British parliament. Gladstone later said of the bribery and intimidation which secured the Irish votes necessary for the passing of the Act that there was 'no blacker or fouler transaction in the history of man'. The parliament had represented the interests of some half a million Anglo-Irish Protestants, the Ascendancy as they were known, not the other three million who inhabited the island. The latter were Catholics whose voice counted for little or nothing. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Irish representation did have Irish interests at heart, and it took a massive exercise in bribery and coercion to secure the 162 votes (out of a total of 303) by which the Union passed. Instead of representing their constituents and legislating for themselves in Dublin, Irish parliamentarians, some one hundred in all, henceforth had to travel to London where they were in effect rendered impotent through being subsumed into an assembly approximately 650 strong. The seventeen MPs who are today returned from Northern Ireland owe their positions to the Act of 1800.

But before we come to the events which reduced the Irish

representation at Westminster by over 80 per cent, it is necessary to examine briefly what happened in Ireland after the Union. Economically Dublin began to decay as the centre of power shifted to London and society went with it. Bereft of their patrons, both arts and crafts entered upon a period of prolonged decline. Throughout the country the scourge of absentee landlordism grew more pronounced. Too often London lifestyles came to be maintained by the subdivision of holdings into ever more numerous, and therefore smaller, rent-producing units. One consequence of the attempt to maximise yields from smallholdings was the reliance on the potato which created the great famine of the 1840s. I say 'great famine' advisedly, because in fact fertile Ireland had been afflicted by some ten other serious famines, accompanied by war, pestilence and starvation to the death, in the previous five hundred years.[6] One of the landmarks of Ireland is the Obelisk standing atop of Killiney Hill, overlooking Dublin Bay. It was erected as a relief work during a famine which occurred one hundred years before the major nineteenth-century famine.

Unlike many of its predecessors this famine was not attributable to war, or invasion, but to crop failure. It was clearly foreseeable as there had been lesser potato crop failures on fourteen occasions between 1816 and 1842. But the system of administration was so inefficient and so geared to the interests of the Protestant Ascendancy that nothing was done.

An assimilative, energetic race like the Irish could not be completely subjugated, of course. Catholics found loopholes in the penal laws to slip into positions of some prosperity in trade and commerce. A certain leniency in the entry regulations to the legal profession, combined with the availability of education on the Continent for those who could afford it, produced a number of successful Catholic lawyers, of whom the most eminent was Daniel O'Connell. To paraphrase Joyce, it became possible for some Irish Catholics to achieve a relatively prosperous domicile by silence and cunning. But, particularly in the west and north-west, the general position of the Irish peasants was one of near helotry, living out their lives in conditions of poverty and disease which objective English observers adjudged unfit even for the rearing of animals. Fear of famine was the great underlying political reality of peasant Ireland.

Sex being one of the few outlets from their wretchedness, the Catholic peasantry produced children in such numbers that not even the virulent fevers of the time could prevent a population explosion which the failure of the potato crop in the 1840s turned into a nightmare.

However, while the Act of Union stunted the political and economic growth of Irish Catholics, it had the opposite effect on their Church and its clergy. Rome was not unmindful of the merits of

being brought more closely into the orbit of a great imperial power and at the same time gaining a powerful bulwark against the spread of godless French republicanism. Symbolically enough, the year which saw the formation of both the United Irishmen and the Orange Order also saw the opening of the great Catholic seminary, St Patrick's, at Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The British allowed this substantial relaxation of the penal laws largely on the basis that it was cheaper to fund Maynooth professorships than to pay Crown prosecutors. They got value for their money, with the natural conservatism of the Church and its abhorrence of secret societies being continuously deployed against Irish revolutionary forces.

The greatest mass movement to emerge in the country following the Union was Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Catholic emancipation. Emancipation was finally conceded in 1829. This was followed in 1837 by the Tithe Commutation Act which put an end to a major source both of Catholic grievance and of sectarian conflict. The Catholics had been forced by law to contribute a tithe of their income to the upkeep of a church which was not theirs. But, as one historian has noted, in some cases the tithe 'had been racked up by lay impropriators, and in other ways, until it often reached nearer to a quarter of the produce than one-tenth'.[7] The injustices of the system eventually led to a 'tithe war' in which the tradition of underground secret agrarian societies came alive once again in Ireland. The 'tithe war' culminated in the 'Rathcormack massacre' in Co. Cork during May 1834. A score of peasants were killed and several more injured during fighting which broke out over the collection of forty shillings in tithe arrears from a Catholic widow. The resultant adverse publicity led to a blunting of Tory opposition to the passing of the Commutation Act.

By that time O'Connell had built up what deserves to be regarded as the first successful non-violent civil rights organisation in history, the Catholic Association. Its strength was based on organisation, moral force and the influence of the clergy, who, because of their education and respected place in Irish society, occupied positions of authority throughout the Association. O'Connell's success therefore carried with it the demerit of creating a bogeyman figure for either anti-clerical Nationalists, or Protestant propagandists: the Priest in Politics. O'Connell's other great cause, repeal of the Union, was not a success. The repeal movement lost momentum in 1843 after the British proclaimed illegal a huge meeting which he had intended to address at Clontarf. Fearing a slaughter if he went ahead, O'Connell called it off and his authority suffered something of the same diminution as did that of the Danes because of the earlier, bloodier, battle of Clontarf. The famine provided an apocalyptic eclipse of O'Connell's career. He died during its worst year, 'black forty-seven'.

The following year, 1848, the Young Irelanders' Revolution, which was in effect nothing more than a burst of outraged idealism on the part of a group of O'Connell's more radical young opponents and disillusioned former followers, petered out in a fracas in the widow McCormack's cabbage garden. However, the Young Irelanders are respected by separatists of the physical force tradition for ensuring there was a rising in every generation, even in the appalling aftermath of the famine.

In all, the famine years consigned some one million people to the grave, a further million to emigration and probably condemned a further million to a half-life of poverty and near-starvation. Previously there had been heavy emigration from Ireland, particularly after the Napoleonic wars when agricultural prices fell steeply. But this swelling tide of human misery carried with it, to America in particular, a lasting characteristic of anti-British feeling that forms part of the tradition of continuing support for physical force which, to a degree, continues to assist the IRA today.

In his novel *Paddy's Lament* the novelist Thomas Gallagher quotes statements from Gladstone, and by the London *Times*, prophesying the effects of the famine on the Irish diaspora, principally in America.

Gladstone wrote to his wife referring to 'that cloud in the west, the coming storm, the minister of God's retribution upon cruel and inveterate and but half atoned injustice'. The *Times* said:

> We must gird our loins to encounter the nemesis of seven hundred centuries' of misgovernment. To the end of time spread over the largest inhabitable area in the world, and confronting us everywhere by sea and land, they will remember that their forefathers paid tithe to the Protestant clergy, rent to absentee landlords and a forced obedience to the laws which these had made.

Significantly, the passage from Gallagher's work using the quotations was reprinted in the newsletter[8] of an Irish-American ginger group which also recorded the success of the Irish-American lobby in defeating an anti-IRA move in the Senate. The right-wing Senator Jesse Helms, a friend of Ian Paisley, was forced to drop a planned amendment to the Senate Appropriations Bill which would have cut off all aid to Ireland until the IRA surrendered its weaponry.

Another outcome of the famine which had a lasting impact was the formulation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The IRB – or Fenian movement, as it became popularly known after the legendary Irish version of the Samurai – was founded in 1858 in Dublin, and the following year spread to New York, where the movement became known as Clann na Gael (Family of Gaels). Like the United Irishmen, of which it was a lineal descendant, it was an oath-bound secret society whose revolutionary objectives were as much anathematised

by the Church as by the British. Bishop Moriarty of Kerry produced one of the more celebrated denunciations, saying of the Fenians that: 'Eternity is not long enough nor hell hot enough to punish such miscreants.'[9]

But despite being greatly feared and hated, the Fenians' significance, like that of the Young Irelanders, lay less in the field of actual revolution than in the impetus which it gave to a body of revolutionary ideas concerning republicanism, separatism, identity and a consciousness of being Irish whose historical hour did not strike until the following century. The British infiltrated the movement with informers, and a planned uprising in 1867 fizzled out with nothing much in the way of military activity beyond some dynamite explosions in London and other cities which were the precursors of the contemporary IRA bombing campaign. Hangings, floggings, jailings and transportations added new martyrs to the Irish physical force tradition, and constitutional Ireland turned to other movements.

The O'Connellite demand for repeal became adapted to a call for Home Rule. Under Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the Irish parliamentary party at Westminster, this call came close to success. He did succeed in exerting sufficient pressure on Gladstone to commit the Liberals to supporting Home Rule. But in 1890 Parnell was cited as co-respondent in a divorce case. In the ensuing controversy the party split, and Parnell died prematurely the following year. He had managed to unite the three major streams of Irish self-assertion under his leadership: firstly the parliamentary party itself, which he had made into a formidable force through a strategy of giving or withdrawing his support to either the Liberals or the Conservatives according to the circumstances of the moment; secondly the Fenians, who agreed to put their energies at his disposal; and lastly the Irish Land League, founded by an ex-Fenian, Michael Davitt, with the objective of rectifying the crisis on the land.

A combination of the Land League's activities and the adoption by the Conservatives of a policy known in Ireland as 'killing Home Rule by kindness' ultimately did lead to a solution of the land issue. Throughout the later part of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, a series of reforming Acts facilitated the buying-out of the landlords and the creation of a peasant proprietorship. But politically Parnell's fall meant that the life force of the people began to express itself through cultural and sporting channels.

It was the era of the so-called Celtic Dawn. An Irish literary renaissance, spearheaded by Protestant intellectuals like Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory, centred on the Abbey Theatre. Another Protestant, Douglas Hyde, founded the Gaelic League, which generated widespread enthusiasm for the idea of restoring the Irish language. The Gaelic Athletic Association, founded by a Catholic, Michael

Cusack, attracted even more widespread support for the ancient Irish sport of hurling, and for a hybrid version of rugby and soccer, Gaelic football, which also gave rise to Australian Rules 'footie'. All this energy, coupled with a corresponding enervation on the part of the Protestant Ascendancy, inevitably had a political effect also.

At Westminster John Redmond accomplished the herculean task of both uniting the pro- and anti-Parnellite wings of the Irish party and persuading Herbert Asquith's government to once more bring forward a Home Rule proposal for Ireland. By now the contours of the present Irish Troubles had established themselves both in north-eastern Ireland and at Westminster. Dependent for his continuation in government on the support of Parnell and his Irish votes, Gladstone had put forward a Home Rule Bill in 1886. Introducing it he had said:

> I cannot conceal the conviction that the voice of Ireland as a whole is at this moment clearly and constitutionally spoken. I cannot say otherwise when five sixths of the lawfully chosen representatives are of one mind on this matter . . . certainly I cannot allow it to be said that a Protestant minority in Ulster, or elsewhere, is to rule the question at large for Ireland. I am aware of no constitutional doctrine tolerable on which such a conclusion could be adopted or justified.[10]

Gladstone had described the situation regarding Home Rule with both eloquence and accuracy. However, he was about to be presented with a 'constitutional doctrine' which made nonsense of his efforts, and the efforts of many who came after him, to apply democratic principles to the Irish situation. That doctrine was summed up by Randolph Churchill, the man who coined the phrase, before a Belfast audience: 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right.' Churchill is also generally credited with being the man who introduced into British politics the tactic of 'playing the Orange card', that is, using the situation in northern Ireland for English electoral advancement. As Gladstone was making up his mind about Home Rule, Churchill wrote to a friend: 'I have decided some time ago that if the GOM [Gladstone] went for Home Rule, the Orange card would be the one to play.'[11] The emotion generated by the Tory/Unionist alliance defeated Gladstone's proposal and his government fell. His assessment of the support in Ireland for Home Rule was borne out: eighty-six Home Rulers were returned, as against seventeen opposed. However, the election also returned a Conservative government, thus rendering the Irish Home Rule representation impotent.

From the time of the plantations by Scottish settlers, the province of Ulster as a whole had developed differently from the rest of Ireland, and particularly so during the nineteenth century. Politically, the

experiences of the Presbyterians – who, because they too were discriminated against by the Anglicans, though to a lesser extent than the Catholics, had thrown in their lot with the Catholics during the 1798 rebellion – had been so traumatic that Anglicans and Presbyterians now formed a united front on the Union against their Nationalist and Catholic neighbours on the Home Rule issue.

The system of land-holding for the planters had traditionally been more liberal than in other parts of the country; the land issue was not the source of discontent it was in the south and south-west. Moreover, as in other countries, the north had become more industrialised than the south. Linen, ship-building and heavy engineering generated wealth, employment – and friction. By the time of the First World War, Belfast had an only too well founded reputation for bigotry and sectarian strife. Catholics, attracted by the jobs, frequently came into conflict with Protestants. The Protestants got most of the jobs, certainly the more skilled, craft-worker positions, but there was sufficient work about for a thriving Catholic community to have established itself in and around the main west Belfast artery of the Falls Road, where it existed in resentful proximity to its Protestant counterpart, the Shankill Road.

Visually Belfast differed in appearance from other Irish cities like Dublin or Cork. It was a red-bricked Mancunian look-alike set down in the Irish countryside. That countryside also looked different to what one would have seen around Cork or Dublin. Instead of the unkempt lusciousness of the south there was the neat fertility of the Scottish lowlands. Opposition to Home Rule was thus the external, political manifestation of a series of fundamental differences between the Catholic and Protestant traditions. The Tory espousal of the Unionist cause also introduced a different approach by the Conservatives to that normally associated with parliamentary democracy.

The 'playing the Orange card' strategy had the twin results of enshrining a fundamentally anti-democratic strain in Conservative thinking on Ulster and giving to the Unionist cause the incalculable benefit of the support of one of the great political parties of England in their efforts to negate the returns from ballot boxes in Ireland. The outcome was to be amply demonstrated in 1912 during the third major effort to introduce a Home Rule measure for Ireland. The Liberals, under Herbert Asquith, were once again dependent on the Irish parliamentary party. Introducing the Bill, Asquith echoed Gladstone's arguments and pointed out that over the previous twenty-five years four-fifths of the Irish electorate had consistently returned Home Rule candidates. To no avail: the near treasonous behaviour of the Conservatives overpowered all rational political argument on the issue. As the distinguished historian Nicholas Mansergh has stated:

> No stranger episode is to be found in the history of Conservatism than in the abandonment of pretensions in the three years before the First World War to be the party of law and order.

The principal actors in the drama of Tory/Unionist resistance to Home Rule were the Conservative Party leader, Andrew Bonar Law, and the Unionists' leader, Edward Carson, a Dublin-born lawyer. Apart from a desire to return the Tories to power via the Orange card, the Scots-Canadian Bonar Law had strong Ulster connections. His father had been a Presbyterian minister in the province. In addition, his London hostess was the doyenne of Unionism, Lady Londonderry, whose house in London was also Carson's second home. Carson had been an indefatigable Crown prosecutor in Ireland. Operating in a world of 'packed' juries and coercive legislation, he had implemented the 'stick' portion of Chief Secretary Arthur Balfour's policy of 'the carrot and stick', as it was known to Nationalists. The slow pace of reform on the land issue, 'the carrot', with its consequential widespread agrarian outrage was balanced by an equally widespread application of coercion. One of the great 'remember' cries of the period was 'remember Mitchelstown'. It was the Mitchelstown incident in Co. Cork which really launched Carson. He was the Crown prosecutor in a case against William O'Brien, one of the leaders of the land agitation, which became a *cause célèbre* in 1887 after police had fired on a crowd of stone-throwing demonstrators, killing three of them and wounding many more.

Carson went on to become one of the leading barristers in English legal history. An 'ugly hatchet-faced man', he had a type of mind not uncommonly met with at the bar: 'Ruthless, defiant, with thinly veiled contempt for democracy', he made no bones about his methodology, saying flatly that he 'intended to break every law that is possible'. Bonar Law's rhetoric was even more extreme. At the Balmoral show grounds in Belfast, standing under the largest Union Jack in the world (48 feet by 25), on 9 April 1912 he solemnised the 'wedding of Protestant Ulster with the Conservative and Unionist Party', in the presence of some 100,000 spectators, and a platform that included seventy MPs. His speech included emotive comparisons between the siege of Derry during the Williamite war and the contemporary situation:

> Once again you hold the pass, the pass for the empire. The timid have left you; your Lundys have betrayed you; but you have closed your gates. The government have erected, by their Parliament Act, a boom against you to shut you off from the British people. You will burst that boom. That help will come, and when the crisis is over men will say to you in words not unlike those used by Pitt – you have saved yourselves by your exertions, and you have saved the empire by your example.

This could have been defended on the grounds of being delivered merely for local consumption, but speaking later in the summer, at Blenheim Palace on 24 July, after several incidents of sectarian violence had already occurred in northern Ireland in the wake of his April speech, Bonar Law made it clear that he was consciously lending his position to violent resistance to Home Rule. Reading his remarks, even at this remove, it appears incredible that they could have been uttered by a man who was not only leader of the Conservative Party, but also a potential prime minister of England. He said:

> We regard the government as a revolutionary committee which has seized upon despotic power by fraud. In our opposition to them we shall not be guided by the considerations or bound by the restraints which would influence us in a normal constitutional struggle. We shall take the means, whatever means seems to us most effective, to deprive them of the despotic power which they have usurped and compel them to appeal to the people whom they have deceived. They may, perhaps they will, carry their Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons but what then? I said the other day in the House of Commons, and I repeat here that there are things stronger than parliamentary majorities . . . Before I occupied the position I now fill in the party I said that, in my belief, if an attempt were made to deprive these men of their birthright – as part of a corrupt political bargain – they would be justified in resisting such an attempt by all means in their power, including force. I said it then, and I repeat now with a full sense of the responsibility which attaches to my position, that, in my opinion, if such an attempt is made, I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not be prepared to support them, and in which, in my belief, they would not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.

The foregoing was, as Asquith said, a 'declaration of war against constitutional government'. But Bonar Law and Carson continued unimpeded as they made it clear that they intended to back up their words with deeds. Later in 1912, on 19 September, Carson called a press conference at Craigavon, the mansion near Belfast owned by Sir James Craig, the heir to a whiskey-distilling fortune, at which he revealed that the Unionists had drawn up an Ulster Covenant, based on the old Scottish Covenant. It contained the following:

> Being convinced in our consciences that home rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship, and perilous to the empire, we . . . loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty King George V . . . do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn covenant . . . to stand by one another in

> defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom, and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a home rule parliament in Ireland . . . and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority,

This was no empty formula. Some 470,000 people signed the Covenant and 100,000 more were enrolled into an Ulster Volunteer Force. A senior English officer, General Sir George Richardson, was placed at the head of these 'loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty'. As an indication of how the UVF was looked upon by the British 'officers and gentlemen' class, it should be noted that Richardson was suggested for the post by one of England's most eminent soldiers, Field Marshal Sir George Roberts, on the grounds that Richardson 'knew men and war from fighting the Pathans and the Afghans on the North-West Frontier'. Richardson did not have to depend solely on his NWF experiences; there were frontiers of influence readily open to him a great deal closer to home. Supporters of the Orange card strategy included members of the Establishment such as Waldorf Astor, Lord Rothschild, Lord Milner, Lord Iveagh, Sir Edward Elgar and the Duke of Bedford. Considerations of the indivisibility of empire, or affection for Irish Unionists, were not uppermost in these gentlemen's minds, convulsing their dinner parties, and those of society London generally, with heated controversy over the 'Ulster crisis'. As a historian of Unionism, Patrick Buckland, has pointed out:

> Not only was the unionist leadership more responsive to Ulster unionism. The party at large was more inclined to endorse the vehemence of Ulster unionists . . . Unionists [i.e. Conservatives], furious with frustration at their continued exclusion from power, were . . . willing to adopt almost any means to defeat the Liberals and return to office.

The Duchess of Somerset articulated the feelings of Tory grandees when she wrote to Carson in January 1914 that 'this country will follow you now and we shall all help you to see this thing through and this vile government will go out'.

But in their public support for the Unionists Conservative apologists concentrated their fire not on party advantage but on large questions of empire and of religious freedom, summarised by Rudyard Kipling in lines from a poem he wrote for the Tory *Morning Post*:

> We know the hells declared
> For such as serve not Rome –
>
> One law, one land one throne.
> If England drive us forth

> We shall not stand alone.

Lest anyone labour under the illusion that their activities stopped short at poetry readings, the Unionists also formed a provisional government ready to take over the province should Home Rule be applied. The Curragh Mutiny drama played out during March 1914 ensured that it would not. The Curragh incident began when a majority amongst the British officers stationed at the principal Irish base, the Curragh Camp in Co. Kildare, let it be known that they did not wish to be involved in forcing Home Rule on their fellow Conservatives in the north. They were confronted neither by enforced resignations, nor courts martial. In fact they were not confronted at all. Having been summoned to London, their leader, Brigadier H. P. Gough, came back to the Curragh from the War Office with a document, the last paragraph of which, written in his own handwriting, read as follows: 'I understand the last paragraph to mean that the Troops under our command will not be called upon to enforce Home Rule and we can so assure our officers.'

What this assurance meant in practice was spelled out a month later, on 24 April, when police and customs officials stood idly by as 300 tons of rifles and ammunition were landed illegally from Germany for the UVF at three separate locations, Bangor, Donaghdee and Larne. Whoever was going to enforce Home Rule, it would not be the British Army. In the event there was no pretence at enforcement. Shortly after the Great War broke out, and on 18 September 1914, Asquith sidelined the Home Rule issue by formally introducing Home Rule to law but accompanying the measure by an Amending Bill which suspended its operation until after the war.

Though the crisis thus appeared to pass inconclusively, it had in fact thrown up the formula which the British would later use in what for many years appeared to be a successful attempt to solve the Irish question: partition. Partition had been formally proposed by Bonar Law at a conference convened by the King at Buckingham Palace on 21 July 1914. He suggested the exclusion of six of Ulster's nine counties from the working of the Home Rule Bill. This was opposed by both Redmond and Carson, Redmond on the grounds that the six excluded counties – Armagh, Antrim, Down, Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone – contained sizeable Catholic minorities. Instead he sought a system of option whereby counties could opt for or against Home Rule depending on their religious coloration.

Carson objected on the cunningly chosen grounds that nine counties would be the best solution, because the increased Catholic representation from the remaining three Ulster counties, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, would be a force for the eventual coming-together of the two parts of the island! The sincerity of this argument

need not detain us long; Carson was opposed to Home Rule for any part of Ireland but he was keenly aware that the Liberals, and many Conservatives, supported the county option idea, and did not wish to leave himself open to charges of obduracy. Later the Unionists would abandon the pretext of favouring ultimate unification, but before looking at how and why this was done it is necessary to examine how nationalism reacted to the Home Rule crisis, because it was this reaction which led to the establishment of today's republic.

Throughout most of the controversy the vast bulk of Nationalist opinion supported John Redmond. People expected England to keep faith. The Unionists could huff and puff all they liked, but the ineluctable fact appeared to be that the majority in favour of Home Rule in the House of Commons was over 100 votes. That was the significant statistic, not how many people signed a strange-sounding covenant in Belfast. Moreover, in the middle of the controversy, during 1913–14, people's attention became focused on the great industrial dispute between the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, led by Jim Larkin and James Connolly, and the Dublin employers, led by William Martin Murphy. After Murphy dismissed workers who refused to resign from the IT&GWU, Larkin declared a general strike of his members. Murphy and the other employers responded by declaring a general lock-out. Connolly and Larkin were both arrested. Clashes between strikers and police became commonplace in Dublin. In November of 1913 a citizens' army was founded to protect the workers from police brutality. This tiny but significant unit was shortly to be subsumed into another, larger grouping.

For, unknown to the public, the IRB had secretly become reorganised. Imbued with the conviction that Home Rule was a sham – and indeed a fact overlooked in the welter of controversy was that the financial provisions of the Bill were so limited that Ireland would have had less independence than Britain's other colonies – the IRB had decided that the time was approaching for an implementation of Wolfe Tone's dictum that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity. The formation of the UVF gave the IRB the chance it had been waiting for. Eoin MacNeill, a respected scholar, was persuaded by colleagues in the Gaelic League, who unknown to him were members of the IRB, to write an article in the League's newspaper, *An Claideamh Soluis* (*The Sword of Light*), proposing that the Green tradition should have a corps to match that of the Orange in order to withstand any effort to frustrate the introduction of Home Rule by force. The article appeared on 1 November 1913. The response to it, an overflowing public meeting in the Rotunda, Dublin, on the 25th, showed how the behaviour of the Conservatives and Unionists had begun to affect Nationalists. The meeting unanimously adopted the

Volunteer Manifesto which proposed the setting-up of an Irish volunteer corps all over the country in order to frustrate the plan

> . . . deliberately adopted by one of the great English political parties . . . to make a display of military force and the menace of armed violence the determining factor in the future relations between this country and Great Britain.

The government, which of course had made no response to the formation of the UVF, reacted by issuing an order banning the importation of arms into Ireland. This was the order which the UVF openly flouted a few months later. The hatred of the Unionists for Home Rule was genuine enough and understandable against a background of centuries of sectarian warfare. In fact, in view of this background it was a major blunder on the part of the framers of the first Home Rule proposals not to have incorporated in the Bill safeguards for those of the Protestant tradition. Failure to do so gave a patina of reality to the 'Home Rule is Rome rule' argument which became embedded in the Unionists' resistance. Nevertheless it was not the genuineness of the Unionists' resistance which gave it its strength. That came from Conservative backing in press, parliament, and security forces.

The numbers who signed the Covenant were certainly impressive. But in assessing them, British governmental reaction to similar, earlier, manifestations of Catholic feeling has to be borne in mind. O'Connell, for example, had addressed a peaceful meeting of 750,000 people at Tara in Co. Meath in favour of repeal of the Union. It was the largest gathering seen in Ireland until the Eucharistic Congress of 1932. But the reaction of the British was to threaten bloodshed if he went ahead with his planned meeting at Clontarf, and to arrest O'Connell. In 1860 The O'Donoghue brought a petition to London seeking an Irish plebiscite on self-determination. The petition contained 423,026 signatures, but it was ignored. In a rural country with a strong oral tradition, where politics was the staple diet of fireside conversation, it appeared to Nationalists that history was not so much unfolding before their eyes as merely repeating itself.

This impression was heavily underscored when the Rotunda Volunteers staged a mini-version of the UVF gun-running (1,500 rifles as opposed to 35,000) at Howth on 14 July 1914. In contrast to the proceedings at Bangor, Donaghdee and Larne, which had been overseen by British officers, the army made a bungled attempt to seize the Howth weaponry. As a result a riot developed at Bachelors' Walk and frightened soldiers fired on a stone-throwing mob, killing four people and wounding dozens more. 'Remember Bachelors' Walk' joined Mitchelstown in the litany of Ireland's Stations of the Cross.

However, mainstream Nationalist sentiment still supported John Redmond. It did not matter that he did not join the wartime coalition cabinet, although both Bonar Law and Carson did. Nor that Irish Nationalists, including his own son, were refused commissions. Even though he made a recruiting speech two days after the Home Rule Bill was adjourned, thereby causing a split in the Volunteers, the largest segment of the movement followed his leadership, becoming known as the National Volunteers. As a result tens of thousand of young Irish Nationalists went to their deaths wearing British uniforms, believing that they were fighting for the freedom of small nations. A tradition, built up over centuries, of 'listing for the Crown' and 'taking the King's shilling' was not easily eradicated. Nevertheless a small section of the Volunteers did remain opposed to recruiting. These, still nominally led by Eoin MacNeill, but in fact controlled by the IRB, became known as the Irish Volunteers. Through manipulation of the Irish Volunteers the IRB now stood on the threshold of the greatest alterations in the relationship between Ireland and England since the coming of the Normans in 1169.

To the accompaniment of much undercover negotiation involving Clann na Gael leaders in New York and the German foreign service, the IRB leadership had decided that the Great War offered an ideal opportunity to implement Wolfe Tone's teaching about taking advantage of England's difficulties. Unknown to MacNeill, who still believed the Irish Volunteers' mission to be wholly defensive, an uprising was planned for Easter 1916. Though no German aid reached the rebels, and MacNeill destroyed whatever slim prospect they had of success when he did hear of the plot, by countermanding it, so that only some six hundred Volunteers, backed by the tiny Citizens' Army, actually went out to fight, chiefly in Dublin, Ireland, in the words of Yeats, was 'changed utterly' by the rising of Easter Week, April 1916.

The people of Dublin at first execrated the rebels: the business community because of the destruction caused, chiefly by British shelling, during the week-long fighting; while the working class were stirred to wrath by the 'separation women', who were receiving separation allowances because their husbands were fighting in the war, and who viewed the proceedings as stabbing the lads abroad in the back. Prisoners were booed as they were led to the dock for transhipment to prisons in England. However, British policy soon had the effect of swinging the popularity pendulum in the opposite direction. Sixteen of the rising's leaders were executed, including all seven signatories of the Proclamation of a Republic for all Ireland. The rising had begun with the reading of it on the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin. Amongst those shot were James Connolly and Padraig Pearse. Pearse was a well-known writer, orator,

and educationalist, whose writings became after his death the inspiration of revolutionary Ireland. Connolly had been so badly wounded during the fighting that he had to be propped up in a chair to face the firing squad.

Apart from creating martyrs, the British compounded their error by a nationwide round-up of suspects. So many innocent people were arrested and incarcerated in England that not only was wrath swiftly converted to sympathy, but the IRB's infectious doctrines, inculcated in camp and prison, were later carried to the four corners of the land on their release. The prisoners provided a fertile source of propaganda in America too, where the feelings of famine-recalling Irish-Americans were of considerable concern to the pro-British Woodrow Wilson in his efforts to win support for America's entry into the war on Britain's side. The chorus of 'remembers' became ever more damning and more insistent, both in Ireland and throughout the Irish diaspora, as the contrast between the treatment of Orange and Green dissidents began to sink in. Realising their mistake, the government ordered the prisoners released within months. It was too late: they returned home, metamorphosed in the public imagination from murderous vandals into revolutionary heroes, to be cheered back on to the streets they had been booed off from.

As by now news of the horrors of trench warfare was also circulating, recruiting fell off, which, coupled with the limitation of opportunities for emigration, created a potentially explosive pool of manpower for nationalist radicals to draw on. And draw on it they did. There is no need to go into the intricacies of the struggle which eventuated. Suffice it to say that the lack of response to honourable John Redmond's painful toil at Westminster destroyed his and his party's credibility. 'Remember John Redmond' joined the litany. This particular incantation, carrying with it damaging implications of contempt for moderation in politics, and for parliamentary methods generally, bedevilled Irish political life for decades afterwards, and still affects Northern Ireland.

Politically, Nationalist Ireland turned to Sinn Fein (We Ourselves), which before the rising had been little more than an opinion group. The party had been formed by a gifted journalist, Arthur Griffith, who preached separatism, self-sufficiency and a dual monarchy for Ireland and England on the lines of the Austrian-Hungarian example. He saw this as the formula for resolving the claims of Loyalists and Nationalists. However, sections of the British media had mistakenly described the rising as a 'Sinn Fein rebellion' because of the success of Griffith's book, *The Resurrection of Hungary*. The newspaper assessment of Sinn Fein became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Having successfully frustrated an attempt to introduce conscription to Ireland the party won seventy-three seats in the 1918 general election. The Unionists

won their customary one-fifth of the poll, 315,394 votes out of a total of 1,526,910. However, the Irish parliamentary party retained a mere seven of their former eighty seats. Home Rule was a dead letter.

Following the election Sinn Fein withdrew from Westminster, set up its own parliament, known as the Dail, in Dublin, and, in reiteration of the demand made in the proclamation of 1916, declared an all-Ireland republic. From then on the Volunteers became known generally as the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Spearheaded by the genius at the head of the IRB, Michael Collins, regarded as the father of modern urban guerrilla warfare for his work in building up an underground intelligence network which defeated the British secret service, the IRA ultimately brought the British to the conference table.

The course of the war need not concern us here. Sufficient to say that if a historical template were cut out and superimposed over the North's troubled counties today, it would fit all too well. Ireland became used to the techniques of ambush, justification of civilian casualties, elimination of spies, demoralisation of police forces, propaganda, and the consequential retaliation: the formation of special forces, the Black and Tans, ex-service men so called because of their black and khaki uniforms, and the Auxiliary Police Cadets. These last were so christened in order to give the impression that this was a 'police war' aimed only at putting down a handful of unrepresentative criminals. The 'auxies' were ex-officers who, like the IRA, were brave men, elected their own officers – and made their own rules: repression, murder, retaliatory destruction of property, torture, unacknowledged shoot-to-kill policies, the use of the judicial system as part of the counterinsurgency methodology, propaganda. In guerrilla warfare, as in other spheres of human activity, there is little new under either the sun or the Irish rain.

However these activities did produce two new developments. Under pressure from both the IRA and public opinion, particularly American public opinion, the British moved to meet the conflicting claims of Orange and Green by partitioning Ireland. Firstly, under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, the Unionists were given a parliament in Belfast to rule over their portion, the six counties in which they predominated, that part of northern Ireland that is today erroneously known as 'Ulster'. The opening of the northern parliament facilitated the establishment of a truce and an invitation to the Nationalists to come to London later in the year for negotiations. As a result of these, the south and south-western parts of the country were ultimately hived off into a Roman Catholic-dominated Irish Free State with the same constitutional status as either Australia or Canada. This state evolved into today's Republic of Ireland.

The irony about partition is that it worked in the area which most bitterly resented it, the Catholic zone. The enforced acceptance came about as follows. The treaty which Michael Collins brought home from London at the end of the tortuous negotiations was rejected by his great rival, Eamon de Valera. In July 1921, before the negotiations began, de Valera, who was then the leader of Sinn Fein, had seen Lloyd George alone in London for a number of tête-à-tête meetings. However, having been fully informed of what was on offer, he managed to evade going back to London for the treaty negotiations, which were conducted by plenipotentiaries led by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith.

Collins had warned even before the truce was declared that once it came into operation his principal weapon, secrecy, was gone. He and his underground army would be like rabbits coming out of their holes. His intelligence network had left him in no doubt as to the extent of the forces in men and money which the British were deploying to bolster the Unionists' resistance to any encroachment on the six-county state. If he did not seize the opportunity of setting up an imperfect twenty-six-county state, the British might not withdraw from the south either. There was precedent for such missed opportunities for Ireland in Parnell's career and what had happened to Home Rule. Conservative Party members and senior figures in the army, like Sir Henry Wilson, who had been one of the architects of the Curragh Mutiny saga, were strongly opposed to such withdrawal, arguing that it was 'giving in to terrorism'. Collins did not regard the treaty as a perfect solution but as a 'stepping stone', as he put it, to full and final freedom. Eventually, after one of the most sterile and rancorous debates in Irish political history, the 'stepping stone' argument carried the day and the treaty was accepted by a majority of the southern electorate.

The sizeable Catholic minority in the northern state viewed the treaty with considerable apprehension because of the prospect of being handed over to the tender mercies of the Unionist and Protestant majority. But their fears found little resonance in the Dail debates. Knowing that he could do little or nothing about the reality of partition – the northern parliament had been in existence before Lloyd George sent for him in the first place – de Valera and his cohorts concentrated their fire on the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown which dominion status entailed. Incredible as it might appear today, partition was almost overlooked in the endless arguments about the Oath, and forms of government. The result was one of the most pointless civil wars recorded since Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels*, described how a conflict broke out between two factions over which end of an egg should be topped. Many sincere young men in the IRA believed that they had taken an oath to an Irish republic and that it

was wrong to stop short of this goal. The machiavellian de Valera appears however to have been motivated, at least in part, by rivalry with Collins and pique at the fact that the treaty was signed without his consent. Certainly in subsequent years he did more to validate Collins's 'stepping stone' theory than anyone else in the manner in which he jettisoned the IRA and used the Free State apparatus to work towards dispensing with the link with the Crown.

But his change of approach affected only the twenty-six counties. The civil war which he did so much to foment had copper-fastened partition by the time it ended in 1923. It claimed the life of the charismatic Michael Collins with a bullet and that of the overworked Arthur Griffith through a brain haemorrhage. The importance of Collins's death to the partition issue only became generally known long afterwards as a result of research I conducted while writing his biography. I discovered that Collins, in his capacity as head of government, commander-in-chief of the Free State Army, and, possibly more importantly, head of the IRB, had used the 'stepping stone' as a base for undeclared military actions against the north. Apart from the fact that he abhorred partition and intended using the treaty to end it either by fair means or foul, Collins's seemingly indefensible behaviour has to be understood against the backdrop of the fact that the Catholic population were under severe pressure from the authorities of the Six Counties. In the disorder of the time, undercover squads drawn from the B-Specials (the north's armed, Protestant militia), the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the British Army seemed to be able to murder Catholics at will. Those deaths in the early 1920s formed part of the litany of 'remembers' which accompanied the coming to life again of the IRA in the 1960s. But in the 1920s Collins was the only leader in the Free State cabinet who showed himself willing to respond by assisting the Catholics militarily.

Following his death, his colleagues, none of whom possessed his drive or initiative, had their hands full in merely trying to keep alive the newly formed twenty-six-county state. The aftermath of the death and destruction of the civil war, the waste, and above all the disillusionment – that this was what the independence struggle, 'that delirium of the brave', had led to – drained the infant Free State of vision, political energy and financial resources. Trying to maintain an Irish currency in the face of, at best, unsympathetic, and at worst, unfriendly, British treasury officials assumed a far higher priority than events north of the border in another jurisdiction.

It is to the credit of the first Free State administration that democracy survived in such conditions. But so did the border. When, in 1925, the British, in effect, reneged on one of the provisions of the treaty, there was nothing the Dublin Government could or would do about it. One of the arguments in favour of the treaty had been that it

allowed for the setting-up of a boundary commission. This, it was hoped by the Nationalists, would redraw the boundary in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants. Had this been done, the most the Unionists could have hoped to control of their six counties would have been an unworkable three and a half. The city of Derry, most of the country around it, and the bulk of Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh would probably have gone to the Nationalists and been ceded to the Free State.

It was intended that the commission be composed of a British, a Nationalist and a Unionist representative. However, the Unionists refused to nominate anyone, while the British concurred in the refusal and appointed a South African instead. The man who originally suggested the commission, Sir James Craig, the Six Counties prime minister, who had succeeded Carson as Unionist leader, said he was prepared for war if 'one inch of the loved soil of Ulster' was removed by the commission. No one in authority in London pointed out that this constituted a violation of the treaty. In the circumstances, neither Dublin nor the Nationalist representative on the commission, Eoin MacNeill, had any power to 'deliver'. Amidst much sabre-rattling in the north and disappointment in the south, MacNeill resigned, and the commission left the border unchanged.

The only subsequent changes to the southern state which need concern us were internal. Prior to the treaty the laws of England were the laws of Ireland. Now, in the south, they were altered to take a Catholic complexion. The legal system was changed to allow for prohibitions on abortion, contraception, divorce and the introduction of censorship. While there was no official policy of discrimination against Protestants, the ethos of the south became unwelcoming to aspects of Protestantism. Ethos, economics, emigration, a lower birth rate, the change in administration all played their part in making the south's small Protestant population become smaller still.

It fell from 327,171 in 1911 to roughly 130,000 fifty years later. When James Craig declared that the Belfast parliament was a 'protestant parliament for a protestant people', his hearers understood that custom and usage meant that the Protestants got and would continue to get the jobs and the houses at the expense of their Catholic neighbours. The southern state was much more benign and democratic than that. But it was nevertheless a benign, democratic Roman Catholic state.

The Free State Government, led by William T. Cosgrave, proved itself more committed to democracy than the pursuit of power when in 1927 it encouraged de Valera back into the parliamentary arena from the wilderness to which his war spasm of 1922–3 had consigned him. Five years later he succeeded Cosgrave and began making the southern state appear more republican. The office of governor-general

was removed, and so was the Oath. But while thus attempting to placate the republican rump, which had supported him since the civil war, he also sought to assure right-wing elements of his basic conservatism. In 1937 he introduced his own constitution, which was an attempt to marry these conflicting currents. It was a theocratic, frankly sectarian document which recognised God in its preamble and the 'special position' of the Roman Catholic Church in its text. In Articles 2 and 3 it reiterated the republican ideal by making a specific claim to Northern Ireland. All of these things aroused, and continue to arouse, northern hackles, but did absolutely nothing to tackle the problem of partition. They were nothing but cosmetic window-dressing designed to impress the population of the Twenty-Six Counties.

During World War II Northern Ireland formed a valuable staging ground for the Allies, in particular for flying sorties to protect convoys, and during the Normandy landings. By contrast, de Valera having renegotiated the return of a number of ports deeded to Britain in the treaty which would have been valuable in convoy protection, the south decided to remain neutral. Therefore, to all the historical baggage inclining London towards Belfast's side of the argument, there was added a great weight of wartime obligation. But this fact was ignored by the south a few years after the war ended – with consequences which persist today. In 1949, a coalition government which had managed to oust de Valera decided to steal his republican clothes by declaring the Twenty-Six Counties a republic.

The Unionists riposted by cashing in some of their wartime gratitude chips to secure from the Attlee government a guarantee that there would be no change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland without the consent of the assembly at Stormont. Even though Stormont was later dissolved by London, that guarantee still exists: the veto which the Unionists continue to employ on moves towards a united Ireland. And now, before turning to examine how Stormont came to be dissolved, a number of points have to be made about the northern state: firstly, its extent.

Carson, as we have seen, during the Buckingham Palace conference claimed that if partition were to come it should be on the basis of nine counties, not six. However, after the war, when the setting-up of the northern state was becoming imminent, this argument was inverted. Craig informed Lloyd George that the Unionists wished the new unit to be based not on the nine counties of Ulster, but on six only. As Lloyd George subsequently explained to his surprised cabinet colleagues, the vastly greater Unionist area which would have resulted, were Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan included, seemed logical, but what Craig wanted was control. The extra land would have brought with it extra Catholics and would, as Carson had said, have made for assimilation into a united Ireland. Accordingly, the Unionists got not a state of nine counties, but a statelet of six. But they also took control. The Catholics under their domination would get not the protections of the law, but its sanctions, forcing them into either subjection or emigration. Control, however, would remain.

Two other provisions which the British and the Nationalists agreed with initially were dropped because of the control philosophy. One was an upper house for the new parliament which would have been weighted to provide a redress for Catholic concerns. Carson vetoed this, flatly saying he was as prepared to take to the streets against the proposal as he had been against Home Rule itself. The other proposal was that the electoral system be by proportional representation as it was in the south. However, the very reason that it was introduced by Collins and Griffith to the south, because it protected minorities, was anathema to the Unionists. The last altercation Collins had before his death with Winston Churchill, who was responsible for Irish affairs, concerned Churchill's caving-in to the Unionists' demands that PR be dropped. Churchill, like Lloyd George, wanted the six-county state set up at whatever cost, in whatever shape, for one overriding reason – to get Ireland off the British agenda.

It might have stayed off if the three points concerning extent, structure of government, and the nature of the voting system had been persisted with. Perhaps peaceful assimilation could have taken place. In the event, however, what was created was a fundamentally undemocratic state specifically designed to prevent power changing hands, or to allow reform to take place from within by the normal democratic processes of education, organisation, and the ballot box. In many ways the hard-working, God-fearing fundamentalists of the Six Counties resembled the Boers of South Africa. They developed the same laager mentality and a system of administration very similar to apartheid, albeit based on religion rather than colour. But, unlike the South Africans, no British prime minister warned the Unionists that they must heed the winds of change. London took exactly the opposite approach, hands off, not hands on. The cheques were written, but no effort was made to ensure that the money was spent on maintaining a state that conformed even remotely to British standards. A gathering storm of Catholic grievance burst during the 1960s and a new generation of British decision-takers found that it must return to the old question of Ireland.

1

Bicycling to Busby

> This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember or overthrow it.
>
> Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, 4 March 1861

THERE WERE a number of sparks blowing about the Six Counties in the 1960s, any one of which might have ignited a conflagration. In the event the one that did was the housing question. We will examine later the statistics of the electoral system which helped to shape the housing issue, but let us for a moment eschew the statistical approach for the human one. We will begin our journey through the labyrinth of the north of Ireland's troubles by following in the footsteps, or more accurately the cycle path, of one Co. Tyrone man and his family as, through the generations, they moved towards the most significant confrontation on the housing problem by Catholics since the state was set up.

John Currie had not realised that he was cycling towards Northern Ireland's destiny that evening in 1945. All he was aware of was that his family was growing. He already had four children and he correctly anticipated that he could expect many more. (He eventually had eight boys and three girls.) He knew he needed a new house urgently. The man to see about the provision of this necessity was Moses Busby, a properous Protestant farmer, who was also chairman of the local rural district council. Although Busby was not only a Unionist and an Orangeman, but was even rumoured to be a Freemason, he had the reputation amongst Currie's fellow Catholics of being a 'decent enough old sort'.[1] Perhaps he would prove helpful. Amongst the other changes which the ending of World War II had brought to Coalisland, Co. Tyrone, had been a slight but noticeable increase in the provision of public housing. Also, Currie knew that some houses were becoming vacant on an existing estate. Perhaps one of these might be given to him. On the face of it he had an irrefutable case. As he cycled along, Currie rehearsed the arguments he intended to

deploy: the size of his family; the length of time for which he had been waiting to be rehoused, since before the war; the unsuitability of his present two-bedroomed home. Those facts did not constitute a problem. The fact of his religion did. Were he a Protestant he would have been rehoused long ago.

Currie was not normally resentful about being discriminated against. That was simply the way things were, like the fact that although he had given some of his children Irish names like Sean and Seamus, these would only be accepted for registration by the authorities in their English forms of John and James. There was no point in railing against such matters. One might as well feel aggrieved at the way that, approaching the July marching season, his Orange neighbours not only paraded ostentatiously with banner, fife and drum in commemoration of King William's victory over the Catholics of yore, they also became distant and withdrawn from the Catholics of the day. They ceased to either speak or mingle with them until after the 'twalfth', when normal Irish friendly relationships would re-establish themselves for another year as though nothing had happened. If one elected to live in the Six Counties, rather than emigrate as so many were forced to, then one accepted the system. He earned a reasonable income from his job as a lorry driver. It at least enabled him to live in the land of his forebears, a pleasant land, free of crime, where traditional family values flourished and he and his wife, Mary, could bring up their children in the fear and love of God and of His Blessed Mother.

As befitted a man on an important occasion, Currie had worn his Sunday suit for the interview with Busby, who indeed turned out to be decent enough. They got on together as Christians should. Then, having explained his mission, Currie, as the liturgy demanded, discreetly produced a five-pound note, 'to make up for any trouble' that his request might cause. Busby graciously accepted the large white English banknote, folded it carefully, put it away, and, assuring his Catholic caller that he was 'a dacent man', delivered his verdict on Currie's request: 'The next time one of your own leaves a house vacant I'll see that you get the first offer.'

Currie cycled home, more slowly than he had set out. He made no complaint about Busby's reaction, but, as he was hanging up his Sunday suit, he said to Mary: 'Next time I'll find a better use for my good five-pound note than giving it to Moses Busby.' Five pounds was, after all, a week's wages in those days. But somehow Currie saved up £400 with which he one day bought a house standing on an eight-acre farm. His eldest child, a boy, Austin, took full advantage of another change brought about by the war, the Butler Education Act of 1944. He studied, became eligible for a free university education at Queen's University, Belfast, and in 1964 won a by-election in East

Tyrone as a Nationalist candidate, which made him at twenty-five the youngest MP ever to enter Stormont.[2]

Dungannon was an important town in his constituency. Apart from the historical significance of being the starting point for both the Irish Volunteers in the eighteenth century and the Irish Republican Brotherhood's rebirth in the twentieth,[3] it had the contemporary relevance of being the home of Dr Conn McCluskey and his wife Patricia, both Catholics. In January of 1964, the year in which Currie entered Parliament, the McCluskeys had founded the Campaign for Social Justice. The aims of the CSJ were to collect and disseminate accurate statistical data on how discrimination in all its various forms worked in the Six Counties: in electoral practices, such as the existence of a property vote, or the redrawing of electoral boundaries so that Catholic voting power was nullified; in employment, in public appointments, and, in what as we will shortly see was the keystone of the arch, in housing. Here is Dr McCluskey's description of the results of discrimination in Dungannon, in the year of the CSJ's foundation:

> ... most of the good shops were owned by Protestants. There were two factories in which the lower echelons were Catholic, but they had no managerial representations in the factories. There were two secondary schools: St Patrick's, the Catholic institution, and the Protestant Royal, a fine school. But the difference between the Royal and St Pat's was that the people there knew that its pupils were going to get the jobs when they were educated ... because of what had happened before, the worst farms were in the mountainy parts and they were the Catholic farms. The good lowland farms were mostly Protestant because they had owned them since the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The picture was one of Catholic workmen looking after the roads under a Protestant supervisor or foreman ... among solicitors and doctors there was a fair allowance on each side, because people could choose their school and they could choose their doctors. This was one of the few areas where there was equal treatment. It was a middle-class thing, the golf links, there wasn't the opportunity to discriminate and the community got on well together.

We can see by looking at the career of Michael Farrell that McCluskey's description applied not merely to Dungannon but all over the Six Counties. Farrell, whose destiny was to intertwine with that of Austin Currie and the McCluskeys, played a significant role in the northern upheavals at a crucial stage. Like the McCluskeys and the Curries he no longer lives in Northern Ireland, but in Dublin, where, at the time of writing, he is a prominent lawyer and historian.[4] Growing up in south Co. Derry, he had a somewhat untypical childhood, in that both of his parents came from the south and therefore had no inherited knowledge of the northern situation. He learned about Six County life 'from the other kids' and says that:

> The two things that came across very clearly were one, the almost apartheid nature of society. Though people, Protestant and Catholic, lived side by side literally, there was very little contact between them. Secondly you learned very quickly from the other children at school that Catholics couldn't get jobs in a whole range of occupations. There was no point in applying for jobs under the local authorities or within the Northern Ireland civil service for instance. Nor in a whole lot of private employments, the shipyard and the aircraft factory [Short Brothers, and Harland and Wolff in Belfast] and so forth. That was just the inherited folklore of all the children around, they didn't bother applying for these jobs, they were just closed to them.

An important part of Farrell's childhood folklore concerns the B-Specials, an official, armed Protestant militia, which during his formative years was an all-pervasive feature of the Six County scene:

> I was a teenager during the IRA campaign of the 1950s. There was a very heavy B-Special presence in our area and I remember the oppressive nature of their patrolling. My father had no political involvement whatsoever. He was a very peaceable individual. But I remember him getting very annoyed at the aggressive behaviour of the B-Special patrols who would stop people [i.e. Catholics] and question them. Even when they were neighbours and knew their names well, they would demand their names and addresses and identification and so on. It just gave an impression that the Catholic community were an oppressed and suppressed group to whom all sorts of avenues were blocked and who had no redress against that.

'No redress'? Leaving aside the question of the responsibility and jurisdiction of the two parliaments involved, those in London and Belfast, to which we shall advert in the relevant context, what about the ordinary structures of democracy? Could a Catholic like Currie Senior not have gone along for example to a local representative, a Nationalist, rather than someone like Moses Busby, and had his problems addressed at county council level? The answer is that he could perhaps have had his problems raised, but not solved. Farrell explains why:

> Our area had a small Catholic majority which voted Nationalist. Prior to partition the local rural council, under the system of proportional representation, had been Nationalist-controlled. But the abolition of PR after the state was set up, and the practice of gerrymandering and discrimination, which went hand in hand with the abolition, meant that for all of my youth it was a Unionist-dominated council. No Catholics were employed by the local council and the bulk of council housing was allocated to Protestants. Gerrymandering meant that electoral boundaries were drawn in such a way that an area with a Nationalist majority would be hived off to form a single electoral unit. Then

two areas with very small Unionist majorities would be set up as separate electoral units.

How this system worked in practice can best be seen in Derry City, the capital of the county Farrell grew up in. It was also the storm centre where, in a real sense, the gerrymandering system blew up in the Unionists' faces, bringing British troops on to the streets in 1969 and thus inaugurating the contemporary Irish Troubles. The population of Derry was roughly two-thirds Catholic to one-third Protestant, and the Catholic population kept growing. Nevertheless, the population increase did not mean that the Catholics could ever overtake the Protestants. Successive gerrymanders repeatedly redrew the electoral boundaries, so that the Unionist one-third were able to control the city. The results were that Catholics could not get municipal jobs or houses. Unemployment was rife and Farrell recalls:

> . . . appalling slum conditions in Derry and yet people just couldn't get houses. They had to live in converted army huts. They had to live a couple of families to a house and so on.

The enforcement of these conditions was not due to an inherent cruelty on the Unionists' part. Inefficiency played a role, because they did not build enough houses anyway for either Catholic or Protestant, but, overall, housing policy had a basic political goal. It could be summed up in the same word that governed Sir James Craig's action in turning down the recommendation of a British cabinet committee in 1919[5] which offered not a six- but a nine-county Ulster. The word is: control. The principle of adult suffrage – that is, one man, one vote – was severely distorted in Six County elections. The electoral methodology employed will shortly be described, but here it should be noted that, bearing in mind the fact that most business and property was owned by Protestants, although long abolished in England both business and property votes still counted in local elections when Austin Currie entered Parliament. The general vote was confined to the occupier of a house and his wife. Occupiers' children over twenty-one, and any servants or subtenants in a house, were excluded from the local franchise. Austin Currie explained how the system worked and how it affected him as a young MP:

> Housing was the key to the vote. The vote at local government elections was restricted to property owners and their spouses. Or to tenants of public authority houses and their spouses. I was an MP at Stormont. I could just as well have been an MP at Westminster. I had a vote in general elections to either Stormont or Westminster. But I did not have a vote in local elections to elect councillors because I wasn't married and lived at home with my mother and father. My mother and father were the only two in our large household who had a vote in council elections.
>
> The purpose of the exercise was to ensure that Unionists had continued supremacy in the areas where in fact they were in the minority. Places like Derry, Armagh, Dungannon, Enniskillen and so on. This was the only way in which the Unionists could remain in control. That's why housing was such a fundamental matter. The allocation of a public authority house was not just the allocation of a house. It was the allocation of two votes. Therefore, in marginal areas, he who controlled the allocation of public authority housing effectively controlled the voting in that area.

For four years after his election Austin Currie struggled within the confines of the parliamentary system to improve the housing system in particular and the lot of Catholics in general. Like other young Catholics of his background whose names we will become familiar with throughout this book, such as John Hume, and Bernadette Devlin, he had presentational skills and a confidence acquired through his Butler Act education. The confidence was often more apparent than real. 'I was shaking,' he recalls, 'when I stood up to ask my first question in Stormont.' It was about discrimination and was addressed to the imposing figure of Lord Brookeborough, the then Six County prime minister. However, the fact that Currie was wearing a new suit gave him the extra impetus he needed to master his fears and speak out clearly. After that, he said, 'I felt that if I could confront Lord Brookeborough I could confront anyone.' Confront the system he did, as, bolstered by the McCluskeys' research, he went on to build up a justifiable reputation for being courageously articulate. However, he achieved little in the way of tangible reform. In his own way he was traversing the same fruitless political cycle path which his father had travelled to see Moses Busby twenty years earlier.

Then, in June 1968, he stepped outside the confines of Parliament to make his protest. There was talk of civil rights in the air. The activities of students on the continent of Europe, and of Martin Luther King and his followers in America, were beginning to work their alchemy in Northern Ireland also. A specific civil rights issue came to hand in the improbably picturesque setting of Caledon, a tiny, stone-built Co. Tyrone town that looks as though it was transported to Ireland from the estate of some great English landowner. In and around Caledon there were as usual many Catholics waiting patiently and uselessly for a council house. The housing list contained a total of 269 names; many of them had been on the list for ten years and more. Some of the families had as many as fourteen children. All of them were outraged when the eighteen-year-old Protestant secretary of a nearby Unionist politician was awarded a house when she became engaged – to a local B-Special.

It was decided that, for once, something positive should be done about this injustice. Inspired by the new ideas of protest emanating from the civil rights movements abroad, two aggrieved local families, the Goodfellows and the McKennas, staged squats in vacant council houses. The squats, promptly and brusquely dealt with by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, raised ripples of local interest only. But then Austin Currie decided that the time had come for such a protest and personally led a third sit-in. This one caught the headlines because Currie was an MP. It is generally regarded as the first significant direct action initiative of what was to grow into a historic civil rights movement. For the Catholics in the Six Counties of north-eastern Ireland, the era of Bicycling to Busbys was drawing to a close. The Curries and their like had decided to sit down and be counted.

By now readers should have a reasonable grasp of the 'feel' of Catholic grievance and what it focused on. But the Unionist and British Establishment is not without its apologists. Even at the time of writing, subtle attempts continue to be made to suggest that these injustices were somehow exaggerated and unreal. A professor of sociology at the University of Aberdeen, Steve Bruce, who has become something of a media figure through his writings about loyalism and Unionists, has stated that:

> The civil-rights slogan 'One Man – One Vote' was aimed not at domestic audiences but at London, Paris and Washington, and it was successful in mobilising international support for the movement.[6]

Here is the precise statistical background to the system at which the slogan 'One Man – One Vote' was addressed. The 1961 Census Report for Northern Ireland gives the population as 1,425,462. Computed by the normal standards of adult suffrage, i.e. 'one man – one vote', the electorate for Westminster in 1964, the year Currie entered Stormont, was 891,107. However, if one consults the electoral register for that year (published on 15 February), a different statistical picture emerges for what might be termed the 'domestic' electorate. This retained the business and property votes which 'the UK mainland' had abolished and broke down as follows:

Stormont Electors

Adult suffrage	885,514
University second vote	13,763
Business second vote	12,663
Total	911,940

Local Government Electors

Residents and spouses	648,417
Business second vote	6,467
Company votes	3,894
Total	658,778

One can see at a glance how the inbuilt unfairness of the system distorted both sets of statistics to a greater or lesser degree. In the case of Stormont, the university votes, overwhelmingly Protestant, favoured the Unionists. They obtained a vote both in the perpetuation of a hold on the four university seats and in their local constituencies. In local government they secured a property vote, for both husbands and spouses, on premises valued at £10 and over. They thus legally obtained more votes than there were voters on the electoral lists. (Illegal methods, for instance the widespread custom of personation, not confined to Unionists by any means, served to create the impression that in Northern Ireland the dead somehow reached beyond the grave at election time.) As a former Stormont minister has written, no one in the Unionist Party 'considered it incongruous that 80,000 people in Belfast should be denied a Local Government vote while 12,091 graduates at the University could claim a sizeable parliamentary representation'.[7] The Queen's University franchise gave it four seats out of fifty-two. At least two of the four were invariably Unionist. By redrawing constituency boundaries, or by giving equal parliamentary representation to widely disparate population and geographical areas, it was possible to obliterate the Catholic vote. For example, Co. Antrim had a population of 273,905. Of these, 66,929 were Catholics. Yet all seven Stormont seats went to Unionists. Mid-Down had 41,402 electors but was given equal representation with Belfast's Dock division, which had only 7,612. The discrimination was even greater in the case of local government where, as can be seen in the table above, some 220,000 voters were disenfranchised from the number shown on the Westminster lists. How this worked in practice is best seen in Derry, important to the Unionists in both psychological and political terms. Derry, the Maiden City, was the scene of that historic gesture of 'conditional loyalty', the shutting of the gates in the faces of King James's troops by apprentice boys who defied the governor of the city, Lundy. Lundy is today burnt annually in effigy by the Protestants of Derry, while the apprentice boys' memory is correspondingly venerated. Deep in the Unionists' psyche there still lurks a hope that some contemporary apprentice boys will arise to make a similar gesture in the faces of oncoming liberalism, Dublin, Irish-America, the media, and betrayal from London.

However, in the 1960s Derry's ruling Unionists had more tangible reason to believe in the continuing supremacy of their cause than ancestral yearnings. The 1961 census gives the population of Derry

City as 53,744. Of these 36,049 were Catholic and 17,695 Protestant. The franchise stipulations cut this two-to-one Catholic ratio so heavily that only 14,325 Catholics were entitled to vote. However, this still represented a sizeable majority over the 9,235 Protestants who had the suffrage. But incredibly enough, this numerical superiority was turned into a minority on the council by an exercise in gerrymandering. The town was divided into three wards: North, Waterside and South.

North contained 6,711 voters, divided in the Protestants' favour in a ratio of two to one. It returned eight representatives, all of them Unionists. Waterside had 5,459 voters, again roughly divided in the Protestants' favour by a majority of two to one. It returned four representatives, all Unionist. This left some 11,390 voters penned into the South Ward, which returned eight representatives. Of these voters, 10,130 were Catholics. Understandably, this ten-to-one majority returned a clean sweep of Catholic representatives. But when the Catholic South Ward's eight seats were placed against North and Waterside's combined return of twelve seats, the majority population of Catholic Derry was outvoted 12–8 and housing policy remained in Unionist hands. What this meant in practice was that in 1965 – while there were only a handful of unhoused Protestants – there were 2,000 Catholic families on the city's waiting lists. Of the 177 employees of Londonderry Corporation, 145 were Protestants, earning a total of £124,424. Thirty-two were Catholics, earning £20,424. Derry is the microcosm which enables the reader to understand why the Catholic one-third of the north's population furnished 58 per cent of the north's emigration between 1937 and 1961. Emigration was the reason why the ratio of Protestant to Catholic remained at the same two-thirds:one-third ratio which had obtained when the Government of Ireland Act was passed forty years earlier in 1920 – despite the high Catholic birth rate.

At this stage the question which logically arises – and which has to be answered before we can hope to proceed towards understanding what subsequently befell in both Ireland and England – is: how did England allow a political slum like the Six Counties, whose public housing system and much else besides embodied such marked departures from British practice, to develop into what London claimed to regard as as much a part of the UK as either Scotland or Wales? The short answer is given in the historical introduction to this book. Partition was viewed as a device for getting Ireland off Britain's agenda. Ireland, north or south, was a notoriously thorny issue, a graveyard of political reputations. Getting involved in the internal affairs of the six-county state meant facing the high risk of fetching up in that graveyard.

The longer answer would involve producing a thick book

documenting the number of occasions on which London was informed of injustices in Northern Ireland, either by Six County Nationalists or others, and did nothing about them. The reason why this was done was spelled out at a top-level, off-the-record seminar[8] in London by the former British prime minister, James Callaghan. The seminar was one of a series run by the Institute of Contemporary British History. It attracted former decision-takers on Northern Ireland, who included British and Irish prime ministers, generals and senior civil servants. Callaghan was addressing the question: 'Did the Government miss an opportunity to take policy initiatives that could have prevented the breakdown of law and order in August 1969?' He said:

> I think it was like so many things in politics. It took a crisis to enable us to take the action that was necessary. It is like so many things that you cannot really act [on] even though you know it is logical to act and you ought to be able to act, until circumstances are right that permit you to do so. This is why, probably, we shall enter the European currency, because it will be seen that is inevitable and must be done, and this happens all the time in politics. So I think yes, theoretically and logically we should have taken action to press the Stormont government to do things. In practice it was not, given the surrounding circumstances, politically possible to do it. That's the answer.

Put bluntly, what Callaghan was saying was that it took a crisis, not to 'enable', but to force Britain to do something about the political slum which it had allowed to fester under its jurisdiction for half a century. The 'surrounding circumstances' to which Callaghan was referring were not merely those of the Wilson–Callaghan era. They relate back to the state's inception. For, as the seminar was also informed,[9] since 1922 there had been a Speaker's ruling that Northern Ireland matters could not be raised in the House of Commons. Peter Rose has commented that: 'So successful was this muzzle that during the 1960s the amount of time spent on Ulster at Westminster averaged less than two hours a year.'[10] The original ruling, which quickly became settled policy, was to prevent discussion of sectarian assassinations, which at the time were mostly of Catholics. However, as a result of pressure on London by Michael Collins to hold a public inquiry into the murders, Colonel Stephen Tallents was ordered to produce a report.[11] He found the behaviour of the B-Specials to be 'disgusting'[12] and said privately that the northern Government had 'failed to perform the elementary duty of guaranteeing life and property'. Nevertheless, the report was suppressed and Tallents was bribed into silence by being appointed the British Government's permanent representative in Belfast.

Neither Tallents nor anyone else attempted to prevent the

Unionists from abolishing proportional representation in local government elections the following year (1923), thus facilitating the introduction of the system of discrimination and gerrymandering described earlier. The British Government connived at the abortion of the Boundary Commission in 1925, leaving the Unionist Party, secure within the state's existing boundaries, to carry on as it wished, unhindered by London. As the storm clouds gathered in the latter half of the 1960s, the level of awareness in the House of Commons concerning Northern Ireland was, according to Callaghan, that 'Most members of Parliament knew less about it than we knew about our distant colonies on the far side of the earth.'[13]

The subject seldom, if ever, came up at Cabinet, and Northern Ireland's concerns had '. . . fallen into a settled routine at the Home Office . . .'[14] When Callaghan took over at the Home Office in 1967 he found, on his first day, that there was not one word in his dispatch box about what was shortly to become Britain's worst headache.[15] Some pains had been experienced: the first riots and car burnings of the era had occurred in Belfast, in 1964, and the re-created UVF had been responsible for sectarian murders in 1966. But as Callaghan opened his Home Office dispatch box it was still impossible to foresee the migraine that was to come. In fact, if one were of an optimistic cast of mind, the political situation in the Six Counties, viewed from London, and in particular from Dublin, could be, and was, perceived as taking a turn for the better.

True, the Unionist Party was firmly in power, as it had effectively been since the passing of the Government of Ireland Act in 1920. Indeed, the party had but recently given a demonstration of its effectiveness in the manner in which it had seen off a growing challenge from the Labour Party during the 1965 Stormont elections. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Captain Terence O'Neill, the party had simply wrapped the Orange flag round itself and declared that a vote for Labour would weaken the Union. Election literature of the period spoke of the Labour Party being more of a threat to 'Ulster' than the IRA, the communists, or all the parties in the Republic put together. The growth of a broad-based Labour movement, embodying a commitment to civil rights and, remarkably, embracing both Catholic and Protestant, came to an abrupt stop with a swing to the Unionists of some 7 per cent. The handful of Nationalist MPs at Stormont, outnumbered as usual by the order of three to one, had neither the clout nor, on average, the calibre to force reform.

Nevertheless, O'Neill was widely regarded as a reformer. He had surrounded himself with liberal-minded advisers, made gestures to the minority, such as visiting a Catholic convent, unprecedented in the history of the northern statelet, and, above all, had received the

Republic's Prime Minister, Sean Lemass, at Stormont Castle, the first time a southern prime minister had crossed the threshold since the inception of the state. Later that year, ironically, the same 1965 in which he decimated the NILP by playing the Orange card, he again made history by visiting Lemass in Dublin. But above all O'Neill's main attraction to what might be termed optimistic political opinion was that he was not Lord Brookeborough.

But this was both his strength and his weakness. In the interviews I conducted with him I found that, while O'Neill was no seminal intellect, he was an open, fair-minded man who, within the limits of his conditioning, genuinely sought to move his state forward. This was precisely his demerit in the eyes of his opponents within the ranks of Unionism. The Unionist Party which he inherited from Brookeborough was not the monolith it seemed to outsiders. It was united on upholding the Union and maintaining the border; any drift of Protestants to more exotic shores such as the NILP could speedily be checked, as we have seen, by a rattle on the Orange drum. But within the laager there was a great gulf fixed between the working-class Protestant in, say, the Shankill Road district of Belfast, and the Anglican mill-owner, landlord, or textile baron who reigned on the upper reaches of the party. The grandees of Unionism were able to so ordain matters that meetings were often held midweek, when workers would not normally be free. But social tensions were contained and diluted through membership of the all-pervasive Orange Order. The Order was the keystone of the arch of Unionist patronage and political advancement, its role in the Six County Government and ethos described in the classic summation of the state's first prime minister, James Craig: 'I have always said that I am an Orangeman first and politician afterwards, all I boast is that we are a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant State.'[16]

When O'Neill took over, every member of the Northern Ireland Government was also a member of the Orange Order, as was every Westminster MP. He had to become one himself, joining the Ahogill, Co. Antrim, branch, which was considered so staunch that it gave rise to the parable of the apocryphal Sammy McFetridge. Sammy had been a fine, upstanding bigot all his life, but on his deathbed the dreadful rumour swept the village that he was turning pape. Fearing that Ahogill was in danger of losing its place amidst the Nations of the Earth, a delegation of elders visited the dying man to enquire how the rumour had spread. With his dying breath, Sammy gasped out: 'It's no rumour. It's the truth – it's better that one of them goes than one of us.'

However, most Catholics saw little humour in the Orange Order's activities. With very few exceptions, Unionist local government representatives, such as county councillors, were also members of the

Order, which had the right to nominate some 130 members to the Ulster Unionist Council.

Writing around this period, Andrew Boyd estimated that:

> . . . nearly every other member of the Unionist Council, apart altogether from the direct nominees of the Orange Order, is also an Orangeman or an Orangewoman . . . the local lodges of the Orange Order have the right to nominate delegates to every local Unionist Association . . .[17]

Another characteristic of Unionism, particularly strong in the Presbyterian Dissenting tradition, was, and is, the concept of conditional loyalty. This strain, deriving in part from the Scottish covenanters, had, and has, a certain view of what one should be loyal to. So long as the Crown, or Parliament, did as one wished then one was unswervingly loyal. If not, one reserved the right to take action as one saw fit in defence of the state or constitution. The concept of being British did and does not imply a fidelity to British standards of parity of esteem, respect for Parliament or civil and religious liberties. This was made clear by the leadership of the Orange Order not long before O'Neill became prime minister. From an enlightened wing of Unionism there had come a proposal that Catholics should be admitted to the Unionist Party. It was even suggested that some day they might stand for Parliament.[18] The Orange Order was outraged. Sir George Clark, Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, issued a statement to the papers saying that 'under no circumstances would such a suggestion be countenanced by our institution'. He went on:

> I would like to draw your attention to the words 'civil and religious liberty'. This liberty, as we know it, is the liberty of the Protestant religion, fought for and given to us by King William who at the time secured the Protestant succession to the Throne and gave us our watchword: The Protestant religion and liberties of the nation I will maintain. In view of this it is difficult to see how a Roman Catholic, with the vast differences in our religious outlook, could either be acceptable within the Unionist Party as a member or for that matter bring himself unconditionally to support its ideals.[19]

Sir George's words of course carried the implication that if Catholics were not suitable for membership of the party which ruled the state, they were not kosher where the state was concerned either. Many Unionists would have accepted this corollary without question. Sir Basil Brooke is on record as having told a Twelfth of July gathering in 1933 that because Roman Catholics were disloyal they should not be employed. He said that he took care to ensure that not one was employed about his estate. Pleased with the reaction this statement

elicited (from Unionists), he repeated it several times, ultimately becoming the object of a censure motion put down by Nationalists at Stormont in 1934. The then prime minister, Lord Craigavon, responded by moving an amendment which said that the employment of 'disloyalists' was prejudicial to the state and took jobs away from loyalists.[20] Sir Basil went on to become Viscount Brookeborough and to rule as prime minister for twenty years until O'Neill succeeded him in 1963.

O'Neill described his predecessor as follows:

> He was good company and a good raconteur and those who met him imagined that he was relaxing away from his desk. What they didn't realise was that there was no desk. A man of limited intelligence, his strong suits were shooting and fishing in Fermanagh and when he came up on Monday night or Tuesday morning it was difficult to shake him from some of his more idiotic ideas. In short, it would have been quite impossible, even with his immense charm, for him to have been a minister in London.[21]

Within Nationalist circles Brookeborough was depicted in more sombre hue. He was regarded as epitomising both the control which the security forces exerted in Northern Ireland and the essential lawlessness of the statelet. Brookeborough was the man who had first conceived the idea of the B-Specials, actively assisted in their setting-up, and connived at the turning of a blind eye to their murders and widespread illegalities. He was also rumoured to be the biggest smuggler in Northern Ireland.

Another, authenticated, cattle smuggler tells a tale of woe concerning what is alleged to have befallen when, as a young man, he once flouted 'the Lord's' authority in this area. The smuggler had come to an agreement that he would pay £1 a head for every beast he took across the border to a prominent RUC inspector. As a result he was not stopped on his nocturnal crossings of unapproved border roads. For some years he observed the arrangement faithfully, but as his business grew so did his resentment at the levy. Finally, having built up a herd of 700 cattle, he decided to save the £700 involved, and crossed the border by a normally deserted road – into the arms of a patrol of B-Specials and RUC.

Following his trial, which involved a fine and forfeiture of the cattle, he was disconsolately emerging from the courthouse when he was accosted by his former business associate, the district inspector, who bought him a commiseratory drink over which he said to him: 'Weren't you the foolish man. That pound did a lot more than give you the clear run. Two and six went to the lads on the patrol, two and six went to the sergeant, five bob went to the DI and ten shillings went to the Lord.' All I can say with certainty about this and other

stories is that 'the Lord' did have an agent in Dundalk who discreetly bought cattle for him. Whether these Fenian Friesians found themselves, in their subsequent careers, transported back and forth across the border so as to avail him of the various subsidies and tariffs which the presence of borders inevitably create, I simply do not know. But it is certainly curious that a man in Brookeborough's position would have tolerated Catholic cattle about his place while making a virtue of excluding Catholic herders. Loyalty to the half-crown, rather than the Crown, has long been a Nationalist taunt hurled at Unionists.

Like many things in the Six Counties it is not the details of such stories that really matter but the perception they give. The image conveyed by the foregoing was that held of Lord Brookeborough by many Catholics, particularly in the farming community.

At all events, O'Neill states that when the Governor-General asked Brookeborough who should be his successor, mentioning O'Neill's name, Brookeborough made no comment. Seemingly he intended that his son, Captain John Brooke, should succeed him. The problem was that the son did not even have a seat in Parliament at the time. In the Unionist Party, 'hands were laid on' when it came to the selection of a prime minister. In other words, there was a convention that the outgoing prime minister informed the Governor-General whom he thought should succeed him, and the Governor-General rubber-stamped the choice. But before John's career had had a chance to blossom to a point where he became an MP (in fact he did not become one for another five years), two unforeseen events occurred. One was an unprecedented call for Lord Brookeborough's resignation, signed by ten Unionist backbenchers worried by rising unemployment levels. The other was a duodenal ulcer which made Brookeborough fear he was developing cancer. The twin pressures caused him to take the unusual step of submitting three names to the Governor-General; Brian Faulkner, Sir John Andrews and Terence O'Neill.

There may have been a third pressure. Faulkner, heir to a sizeable shirt-manufacturing concern – which incidentally did a thriving business in the south – was not a member of Unionism's ruling ascendancy, which was both Anglican and landowning. He was out of the prosperous Presbyterian trader class, who were not altogether chic in the eyes of the squirearchy. Moreover, Lucy Faulkner, his wife, had been Brookeborough's secretary, and it has been suggested that the strong-minded Lady Brookeborough, who exerted considerable influence on her husband, did not wish to see the former secretary elevated to the status of prime minister's wife in her stead. At all events, when the Governor-General consulted the chief whip of the Unionist Party, William Craig, as to who would be the most

acceptable, Craig informed him that an exhaustive canvass of the party had revealed that O'Neill had overwhelming support. Faulkner was in America at the time, and hands were duly laid on. However, it is said that Brookeborough adopted the triple nomination approach to block Faulkner, whom he thought would make a success of the job and thereby seal off John's chances of ever becoming prime minister. Andrews, whose main claim to the post was that his father had also been prime minister of Northern Ireland, had no chance of being appointed. This left O'Neill, who was Minister for Finance and who, it is alleged, Brookeborough reckoned would inevitably make a mess of things and be forced into resignation, thereby perhaps giving John his opportunity. *Peut-être* as the French say, for as finance minister O'Neill certainly held the senior posting after Brookeborough.

But three things may be said with certainty about the foregoing. One is that a senior Unionist minister of the time, Harry West, Minister for Agriculture, is on record as saying that he never encountered any member of the Unionist Party who was canvassed by Craig as to O'Neill's suitability. Secondly, O'Neill came to the premiership not only with no following amongst the working-class and evangelical elements within the party, but with the undying enmity of Brian Faulkner. As the former Stormont minister David Bleakley would write later, O'Neill and Faulkner were always 'on a collision course'.[22] Thirdly, there was such dissatisfaction within the party amongst Faulkner's supporters that new rules were drawn up for the selection of future prime ministers. These factors combined to make O'Neill a sitting duck for attack by Ian Paisley's fundamentalist opportunism once his reformist colours began to peep through his Orange straitjacket. Unionism was not about reform. It was, and is, about control. David Trimble, of the Official Unionist Party, has articulated this feeling perfectly:

> ... the Apprentice Boys myth is very deeply embedded within the consciousness of the Ulster British community ... a community that had then been abandoned or misled by the natural leaders of society ... if they feel their leaders are taking them down a road they do not wish to go or are in any way abandoning them then they are prepared to act themselves ... the banding together element has always been present within rural Ulster at times of unrest ... Terence O'Neill never really sounded or behaved as if he was one of us. Not like Brookeborough, not like Craigavon, not like Faulkner ... really until he arrived here to as it were inherit one of the family seats he had no connection with Ulster ...

O'Neill's career epitomised the twilight of the Big House, as the homes which formed the centrepieces of the great Anglo-Irish estates were known. The light had already gone out in the Republic, to be lit

only in remembrance by writers such as Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane. But in the north there was still a plethora of majors and captains to be found commuting between their country residences and the upper slopes of the Stormont political establishment. Colonels were scarcely met with and sightings of generals were almost unknown until the British began sending them over from England at the close of the decade to patch up what the captains and the majors had wrought. O'Neill was a direct descendant of Sir Arthur Chichester, the Lord of the Plantation in Ulster under James I. His father, again a captain, had been Westminster MP for Mid-Antrim, and was the first MP to be killed during the 1914–18 war. Both O'Neill's brothers were killed in the Second World War, in which he served in the Irish Guards. His uncle, Sir Hugh O'Neill, had also represented Antrim at Westminster, from 1915 to 1949, and was a founder member of the Conservative 1922 Club. His aunt, Dame Dehra Parker, represented South Derry from 1920 to 1931 and then passed the seat on to her son, Major Chichester-Clark. However, he died only two years later and, things being as they were in Unionism, the Dame repossessed the seat, and, having become a minister in the interim, passed it on in 1959 to her grandson, James Chichester-Clark. When O'Neill became prime minister the chief whip at Stormont was a cousin, as was the Stormont MP for North Antrim. Two other cousins represented Derry County and North Antrim at Westminster.

It was an impressive superstructure, but the foundations were susceptible not only to an erosion of mistrust as indicated by Trimble, but to a form of economic erosion which had already begun when O'Neill succeeded Brookeborough. The economic situation was now about to trigger explosive political and religious consequences. Prior to O'Neill's taking over, unemployment had risen at a steady rate which traditional Unionism showed neither the will nor the capacity to arrest. A development council, set up under Lord Chandos in 1955, 'did little more than wine and dine visiting industrialists and had little success'.[23] The Hall Committee, a conglomeration of British and Northern Ireland civil servants, issued a report in 1963 suggesting that an economic advisory council be set up – and that the unemployed be encouraged to emigrate to Britain.[24] In 1963 unemployment was running at 9.5 per cent of the workforce (45,000). The Six Counties' principal industries were those most exposed to world trends: agriculture, engineering, and textiles. During the period 1951–61 the decline in agricultural and textile employment was of the order of 40 per cent. In the deep heart of militant loyalism, the Belfast shipyards, it was nearer to 60 per cent. Moreover, it was not merely in the realm of civil rights that the area had been allowed to depart from British standards – average weekly earnings were only 78 per cent of those in Britain. While the significance of the possession of a house has already

been adverted to, it should also be noted that the quality of the housing which the captains and the majors – who of course lived in the Big Houses – had made available to the 'other ranks' was a further source of discontent, and one which bore heavily on Protestants. Some 32 per cent of all the houses in the statelet either had no piped water or no flush toilets. The rate of house building, some 6,000 a year, was woefully inadequate either to deal with new demand or improve existing conditions.[25] Ten years after the decade covered by the foregoing figures, an authoritative report, speaking of the proportions of aged to newer housing stock, said that '. . . the housing stock in Northern Ireland is worse balanced than any region of the United Kingdom'.[26]

By that time, however, an appalling tide of violence had already broken over Northern Ireland. The traditional Unionist response towards meeting social needs was articulated by two Unionists shortly before O'Neill took over. One, Professor Corkery, a Unionist senator, opined that 'The parents of large families should be fined for having so many children.'[27] This was no isolated view. In 1956 the Catholic birth rate had caused the Unionists to attempt a derogation from the established policy of moving in step with Britain to introduce to the north any social welfare improvements effected in the 'UK mainland'. The initial enabling Bill sought to give fourth and subsequent children less than the British benefits. But liberal Protestant opinion forced Brookeborough to announce on 12 June 1956 that he was dropping the proposal. History does not record the views of the other Unionist, Robert Babington, a barrister, on the question of birth control, but we do have his opinions on unemployment policy. He suggested that:

> Registers of unemployed Loyalists should be kept by the Unionist Party and employers invited to pick employees from them. The Unionist Party should make it quite clear that the Loyalists have the first choice of jobs.[28]

This was vintage Brookeborough philosophy and its articulation helped Babington to succeed in his ambition of becoming a Unionist MP. However, O'Neill was no traditionalist. He set out to introduce such modern theories as economic planning, and co-operation with trade unions, to the Six Counties, and achieved a measure of success. Brookeborough had had an aversion to both. Accepting that the traditional north of Ireland industries were in terminal decline, O'Neill encouraged a number of industrial giants involved in twentieth-century technology to come to the province. These included Courtauld's, Du Pont, Enkalon, Goodyear and ICI. Unlike Brookeborough, who had refused to recognise the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) because it was an all-Ireland body, he opened a

link with ICTU through a Northern Committee of Congress, which paved the way for the formation of an economic council based on government, employers and labour.

O'Neill's blueprint for these and other innovations was provided by a number of academics: chiefly Professor Thomas Wilson of Glasgow University who, in October 1963, was appointed economic consultant to the Government; and Sir Robert Matthews who had been commissioned to produce a report on regional development before O'Neill became prime minister. Following the Wilsonian prescription really meant no more than attracting multinationals to the Six Counties, with the consequential drawback of profit repatriation elsewhere. However, while they led to the successes outlined above, they also led O'Neill to espouse policy initiatives involving both Northern Ireland and the Republic which would eventually bring him down. His drive for new outside investment meant that the economic and political dominance of the old Unionist industrialists diminished, albeit very slightly. Both the Unionist rulers and the Protestant working class saw danger signals in the fact that the institutionalised discrimination practised in the older firms could not easily be translated to the newer businesses. Discrimination apart, the old industrial élite's resentment rose as the newer industries begin to dominate the economic landscape, while their own financial and political clout diminished. The workers found that the tradition of the discreet word in Orange or Freemason lodge was not given its customary due by young personnel managers in Courtauld's or Du Pont. The latter were not greatly concerned whether fingers were Catholic or Protestant. All they asked was that they be deft. As a result there was a noticeable increase in female Catholic employment, especially around Derry. Here there was a tradition, described in a famous song by Phil Coulter, that the Catholic '. . . men on the dole played the women's role', while the women worked in the mills.[29]

These tensions, which had been growing during O'Neill's sojourn at Finance, crystallised around Brian Faulkner early on in O'Neill's reign as prime minister. A stalking-horse of Faulkner's, William Warnock, a hard-line former Attorney-General, sponsored an ineffectual backbench challenge to O'Neill in October 1963. Warnock's stated *casus belli* was the manner in which O'Neill had been appointed. He suggested that Faulkner was the man for the job. This threat soon petered out, but other aspects of the new Matthews-Wilson approach, or rather the attempt to adapt it to the old-guard Unionists' concerns, began to open up a second front for O'Neill, bringing him into conflict with the Catholics and undermining the value of his ecumenical approach to them.

Apart from the ongoing complaints about housing, there were four principal issues which aroused strong Catholic protest during 1964–5.

All were concerned with another aspect of Unionist policy, the strengthening of the Protestant east as against the Catholic west of the province. In 1963 the position was as follows. Belfast held half the north's population and half of its industry. The triangle formed by the eastern countries Antrim (which contains Belfast), Armagh and Down contained the bulk of the rest of the Six Counties' industry and population. Two official employment statistics of the period record the gross imbalance thus created between east and west.

In the east the number of people employed in manufacturing by firms with twenty-five workers or more, classified by counties and county boroughs, was 160,392. In the west, embracing the counties Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone, the figure was 28,773. In the Republic of Ireland to the south there was, and is, a constant complaint against the imbalance of the power and wealth of Dublin and its environs in the east compared with that of the west. But in the Republic no one thought the imbalance was based on religious grounds; everyone believed the problem to be political and economic. Some government action, however faltering and ineffectual, could be forthcoming through normal parliamentary pressures. In the Six Counties the position was reversed. Everyone believed the discrepancies arose for religious reasons. No one seriously thought Parliament would do anything to improve matters.

This belief was strengthened when in 1964 the Government cut one of the two rail links serving Derry City and county. The severance left most of the county, and those of Fermanagh and Tyrone, with no railways. The strongly Catholic Newry was also affected by a rail closure and in addition Derry suffered the loss of a shipping link with Glasgow. On top of the railway issue there came the Copcutt controversy. Geoffrey Copcutt was an English town-planner appointed by the Government to design a new town in Co. Armagh. On 13 August 1964 he resigned his post and issued a statement to the press, saying: 'I think there are better regions, environmentally and strategically.'[30] He cited the development of Derry City as a 'priority'. However, the Government went ahead with the building of the new city of Craigavon, called after the man who had declared Stormont to be a 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people'. Apart from the choice of site and name, chosen to commemorate Sir James Craig, later Lord Craigavon, the founding father of the six-county state, Catholics had other reasons for believing that the new venture was less an exercise in town planning than in fortress Unionism. For example, despite the fact that Catholics made up only a third of the overall population of the north, their higher birth rate meant that 48 per cent of the Six Counties' primary school children were Catholic. But the new town plans only provided for the building of five Catholic schools, thereby practically guaranteeing that

many young Catholic parents would be discouraged from taking jobs in the town, no matter what new industries were sited there.

The following year, 1965, while the echoes of the Craigavon controversy were still rumbling through the correspondence columns, the Government adopted a development plan drawn up by Professor Wilson, incorporating Sir Robert Matthews' ideas,[31] which proposed to create 65,000 new jobs by making a total investment of some £900 million in all sectors of the economy, including housing, for which a target of 64,000 was set. However, the implications of these very desirable goals were offset for Catholics by the publication of the list of growth centres wherein most of the employment and development was to take place. Of the ten specified in the report, eight[32] were clustered within a thirty-mile radius to the east. Only one, the last mentioned, Derry, was in the west. It would have appeared to have been a logical area for development as it possessed a port, an airport and some existing industry. But its placing in the list indicated to Catholics that its inclusion was cosmetic and there was no real intention to develop it.

The feeling was intensified beyond anything seen in the state for many years by the publication the same year (in February) of the Lockwood Report on Higher Education. The terms of reference of this committee were: 'To review the facilities for university and higher technical education in Northern Ireland having regard to the report to the Robbins Committee, and to make recommendations.' There was nothing in that remit about also making recommendations as to the site or sites of any proposed new educational institutions. However, this is what the committee did. Its recommendation, Coleraine, in the east, was accepted by the Government.

Derry, which had hoped to be the beneficiary of any extension of university facilities, was outraged. Firstly, it already had a university college, Magee, a constituent college of Queen's University, Belfast. Being the only university unit outside Belfast, Magee had appeared the logical base for expansion. Secondly, Coleraine only had a population of 12,000, less than a quarter of Derry's 54,000. Thirdly, and the third was more than equal to the first, there had not been a single Catholic on the committee. The resultant protest movement was unprecedented. The same sort of liberal Unionist sentiment which had prompted the suggestion that Catholics be admitted to the party surfaced and made common cause with the Catholics of Derry and with the opposition parties at Stormont. A University for Derry Campaign was founded, under the chairmanship of a young Derry schoolteacher, John Hume, who had built a reputation for himself through his pioneering work in establishing the Credit Union movement throughout Ireland. On 18 February 1965 the city of Derry virtually closed down; shops, schools, businesses of all kinds. A

motorised cavalcade containing 1,500 vehicles drove the ninety miles to Stormont to protest the Coleraine decision.

It was to no avail. The Government carried the proposal by a majority of 32–20. This, though substantial, was one of the smallest in the history of the state. Two Unionists voted with the opposition and two more abstained. The university agitation led to the expulsion from the parliamentary party of a prominent Unionist, Dr Robert Nixon, Stormont MP for North Down. His crime was to reveal publicly that prominent Derry Unionists had colluded with the Government against the interests of their own area in favour of Coleraine in order to preserve overall Protestant hegemony. More educated Catholics were the last thing the Unionist hierarchy wished to see coming out of Derry. A petition containing 15,000 signatures was collected, asking in vain that his allegations be investigated. However, although defeated on the university issue, for John Hume, and many other educated young Catholics, the seeds of a civil rights street protest movement had been planted by the Magee controversy. They would shortly sprout.

But in Ireland overall these tensions between the newer, technocratic policies which O'Neill strove to introduce and the visceral 'them and us' nature of northern politics were obscured, for the moment, by another watershed event in which he was involved. On 14 January 1965 he received at Stormont his opposite number from the Republic, the Taoiseach, Sean Lemass. It was a meeting of seismic importance in Irish terms, the first time in the history of the two states that there had been a prime ministerial meeting.[33] Lemass, like O'Neill, was also a moderniser. As with O'Neill from Brookeborough, he had inherited a situation in which his predecessor had stayed on well beyond the point of usefulness. It is one of the tragedies of contemporary Ireland that the aged de Valera did not yield the reins earlier. The Republic, which, unlike the Six Counties, had no subsidies, had almost collapsed economically by the time he did so in 1959. By then he was seventy-eight, blind and incapable of innovation.

As the fifties drew to a close, income in the Republic overall was only some 55 per cent of that in the UK. But as it was nearer 65 per cent in the eastern province of Leinster where Dublin is situated, the sort of imbalances we have seen in the Six Counties were if anything worse in the impoverished western province of Connacht. The population was falling, but the Catholic birth rate meant that births were greatly in excess of deaths. As an outspoken economist, Professor C. F. Carter, said, it was a situation:

> ... dangerous both to the Republic and to her neighbours. Faced by it, the

universal resort of politicians is to seek refuge in fantasy, and usually in the dreary fantasy that prosperity must await the re-union of Ireland.[34]

Lemass was not a man to indulge in fantasy. As a youthful idealist he had fought in the 1916 rising at the age of sixteen. Of Huguenot stock, he was nevertheless a pragmatic politician who understood clearly the co-relation between the growth, or demise, of democracy and economic prosperity. Once, while I was interviewing him about the economic changes he was making in the Republic, he broke off to discuss the fall of the Weimar Republic and urged me to study how economic conditions had helped the rise of Nazism. 'Oh, read about it, you must read about it,' he said. Long sat upon by de Valera, who refused to act on his ideas while he was Minister for Industry and Commerce, as Taoiseach he cut through the old dogmas of protection, tariffs, self-sufficiency and sloganising about the fourth lost green field which had passed for policy. New men were appointed to the Cabinet. The Secretary of the Department of Finance, Dr T. K. Whitaker, produced a Programme for Economic Development which became government policy which Lemass seized upon. Together he and Whitaker revolutionised Irish society. International capital was sought, the country began to look outward.

As in other parts of the western world the sixties were a time of optimism in Ireland. As a new generation took over, new ideas began to permeate the Catholic Republic from a variety of sources: the liberalising influence of Pope John XXIII and his Vatican Council; the coming of television; increased travel; and the relaxation of literary and cinema censorship. The travel was made possible by increased prosperity, the invigorating side effect of new industries. Buoyed by all this, Lemass, in his sixty-fifth year, decided to drive north and meet O'Neill, who reciprocated by coming to Dublin a month later (on 9 February 1965), nine days before the Derry cavalcade set off for Stormont to protest about the Coleraine decision.

The visits had the effect of both adding to the forces ranging against O'Neill, and bringing to centre stage in the swelling northern drama an actor who had hitherto played relatively minor roles: Ian Kyle Paisley. I have heard him defend the term bigot on the grounds that it stems from the last protestations of the Protestant martyrs, who, during the Spanish Inquisition, proclaimed their faith, as they were led to the stake, 'by God'. Paisley's eruption before the footlights of twentieth-century western European politics made him appear a ludicrous figure to some observers. He seemed an aberration from the Thirty Years War who had somehow survived in a theological version of Plato's cave, only to appear, appalling and bawling, into the light of an ecumenical setting in which he was totally miscast.

Paisley in fact was rooted in a historical line of fundamentalist

political evangelists like Henry Cooke and Hugh 'Roaring' Hannah, who in times of economic, political or sectarian tension arose in stentorian fashion to make a bad situation worse. Of them all Paisley deserves to be regarded as Stentorius Maximus, the loudest political voice in Northern Ireland. He cannot be fully exculpated for his own contribution. For most of the period of the Troubles under review he was a dominant figure, bestriding the political landscape of Northern Ireland with the Bible in one hand and both eyes on the ballot box. Apart from the mesmeric effect of his husky oratory, raw sex appeal, and powerful personality and physique, he articulated key elements of some forms of Northern Irish Protestantism.

Conditional loyalty, for example. He stated that: 'If the Crown in Parliament decreed to put Ulster into a United Ireland, we would be disloyal to her Majesty if we did not resist such a surrender to her enemies.'[35] His anti-Catholicism was the purest and most virulent available: 'Through Popery the Devil has shut up the way to our inheritance. Priestcraft, superstition and papalism with all their attendant voices of murder, theft, immorality, lust and incest blocked the way to the land of gospel liberty.'[36] Using such language in press (he founded his own newspaper, *The Protestant Telegraph*, in February 1966), platform and pulpit, Paisley and his 'attendant voices' did more than anyone else in Ireland over the entire period of the troubles to 'block the way' to a constitutional solution of the problems.

Paisley was born in 1926 in Armagh. Conditional loyalty was the leitmotif of his early life. His father had been 'loyal' in the classical Unionist sense through having been a member of Carson's original defiant volunteer corps. He was also deeply steeped in the north's Bible culture and became a Baptist minister – an Independent Baptist minister who founded his own church. At twenty-five, after being a preacher since his middle teens, Paisley too formed his own church, the violently anti-Catholic Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, with himself as its moderator. A few years later he made headlines through being mixed up in the proselytising of a fifteen-year-old Catholic girl, Maura Lyons, who was kidnapped from her home in 1956. Paisley was ordered by a Belfast court to stay away from her.

He was in the news again in 1959 for throwing a Bible at the liberal-minded Methodist minister Dr Donald Soper, during a visit to Ballymena. He derived more valuable publicity amongst the north's anti-Catholics through getting himself arrested in Rome for protesting at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. In 1966 he organised a march to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Belfast to protest against its 'Rome-ward trend' at which the Governor of the province, Lord Erskine, as well as the various church dignitaries present, were heckled and abused. This was one of Paisley's more beneficial pieces of hooligan street theatre. He refused